



Window on Jordan

By Ibtisam Awadat

Special to The Star
AHMAD, 26, holds a degree from a major European university. When he came back home, he got married, but after a few months his marriage ended in divorce. Why? This scenario was repeated twice more. Was the problem with Ahmad, his choice of wives, or was it a problem with the institution of marriage itself?

As it turned out, Ahmad had AIDS and was trying to hide it. Lying to his prospective wives and family is unforgivable; why make his partners suffer?

"The tragedy could have been avoided if he and

the woman he wanted to marry had undertaken a medical test before their marriage," said Dr Abdel Salam Zumeili, a consultant in obstetrics and gynecologist. "We look for infectious and genetic diseases like Thalassemia, syphilis, rubella, and AIDS."

Most of the people who come for a medical check test positive for Thalassemia. That means their children have a 20 to 50 percent chance of being affected by it. Thalassemia is one of the most common diseases in Jordan. Dr Zumeili noted, and that's apparently why one particular young man left his village in Ajloun and headed for the south of the country.

"This guy ran away from his family because he had Thalassemia. After he got married, he found out his wife had it, too."

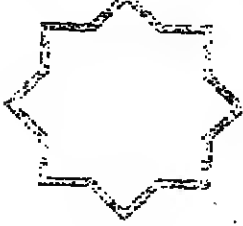
In Jordan, marriage between relatives—usually cousins—is still quite common. These child-bearing marital arrangements are considered the primary cause of the high incidence of child handicaps.

"The proportion of handicapped children internationally is between 5 and 10 percent of the population. Using those numbers, we can calculate that Jordan has at least 200,000 handicapped children."

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The Star



Jordan's political, economic and cultural weekly

Le Jourdain
Supplément en français du Star

L'honneur, au-dessus de tout soupçon

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اسبوعية سياسية مستقلة

Tabloids provide Iraqis with new 'food for thought'

By Nora Boustany

BAGHDAD—Sanctions against Iraq have pushed this country toward a slightly more open media policy after 30 years of socialist-style restrictions on what its citizens are allowed to read, see and hear.

President Saddam Hussein remains beyond scrutiny, of course, but the trying circumstances of common Iraqis, as they struggle with shortages of food, medicine and other goods, is under the lens. To survive the sanctions imposed after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the government has shrewdly realized that the stifler the controls imposed from outside, the bigger the need to allow for breathing space in a country long ruled by secrecy and the suppression of individuality.

In addition, Iraq's more media-savvy officials—unhappy that the plight of Iraqis is being eclipsed from the world's conscience—have inhibited for opening up to the international media, albeit within limits.

On the domestic front, the new strategy means newspapers outside the framework of the ruling Ba'ath party are publishing for the first time since 1968. As for the rest of the world, officials here fear that the lives of 22 million Iraqis are being short-changed by shouting matches between Iraqi leaders and the West. As a result, they have eased the way for cooperation with the foreign media, with an eye toward keeping the focus on hardship conditions.

But all change is relative here.

Although a select few Iraqis who travel or who can afford it have computers with the Windows 95 insignia flashing on their screens, they have no access to the Internet. Satellite dishes are reserved for official use and, except for those being used by foreign journalists, remain illegal. Anyone caught with a satellite dish is fined the equivalent of \$300.

But news from the outside has nevertheless started trickling in. The first step came a few years ago when *Bahar* (Babylonia), the newspaper owned by Saddam Hussein's son Uday, introduced a page with international news—mostly concerning Iraq—under a heading that conveyed distrust of all things foreign: "At the Discretion of News Agencies."

A few months ago, BBC and CNN news shows on Iraq featuring Iraqi and foreign officials began appearing on Iraq television in a program called "From the Screen of Others." Occasionally soc-

Deputies embroiled over fate of 'dead' press law

By Raed Al Abed

Star Staff Writer

THE GOVERNMENT this week lost a round when it was forced to accept a controversial compromise in its proposal that the Lower House ignore the High Court of Justice's January ruling nullifying the temporary press law and continue its discussion in Parliament. The compromise came about after a proposal from three members of the nine-man National Guidance Committee was made, asking that the Court's verdict be respected and that the government-imposed draft be rejected.

Finally, the panel agreed to postpone any immediate decision on the matter leaving the fate of the temporary law hanging in the balance and giving the government precious time to regroup and gather support inside the divided Lower House.

The High Court of Justice, the highest judicial body in the country, made a historical ruling in January annulling the widely condemned temporary law by declaring it unconstitutional. It also ruled in favor of the 13 weekly newspapers whose licenses were suspended and later revoked under the new law. The law was imposed by Al Majali's government last May.

However, the government is not giving up. Its reception of the Court's verdict was lukewarm from the start, and it has never stopped trying to put the ball back in the court of the Lower House. The temporary law was presented to the Lower House a month before the Court ruling, and later scheduled on the House agenda.

Last week the government found itself fighting an uphill battle in the final meetings of the National Guidance Committee which has the authority to discuss and make recommendations about the temporary press law. During these discussions, two clear trends emerged.

The first supports the government campaign to have the law debated by the Lower House which is being pushed

by Acting Prime Minister Dr Abdullah Nusour. He asked the Committee to recommend to the House that the law be put into further discussion. The other trend, spearheaded by Bassam Haddadin, wants the Committee to reject the temporary law based on the decision of the High Court.

After two hours of steamy debate on Monday, a compromise between government and its opponents was reached. A suggestion to shelve the temporary law was accepted by five out of the eight deputies who attended the committee's meeting.

Nevertheless, the compromise ignited speculations that the Court's ruling has not put an end to the temporary law's

chances in the Lower House. Several deputies criticized the committee's decision, including some of its members.

"The committee's decision is a gesture to the government," said leftist deputy Bassam Haddadin, member of the National Guidance Committee. "It is a courtesy in the government that will allow it to find a way out of a difficult situation while planning the responsibility for the government's position on the Lower House."

Committee head Rujh Haddadin, one of five deputies who supports the government proposal, was quoted by the daily press as saying that "the committee postponed discussion for now with the condition that it be renewed during the holi-

days. During this time, the Committee may make a final decision which it will submit to the Lower House in the next ordinary session."

Haddadin rejected Haddadin's claims and accused him of "tonguing the Committee's decision."

"What Haddadin claimed was not what we decided," he said. According to Haddadin, the Committee's decision calls for "putting the temporary law aside and leaving the government with the choice of presenting an alternative draft law if it wishes." Haddadin explained that the decision meant "refraining from debating the temporary law."

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Clinton: Africa victim of American domination

By Elizabeth Shogren

MUKONO, Uganda—Taking on a repentant tone in his second day on the continent, President Clinton said Tuesday that slavery was "wrong" and admitted to other "sins" that he said America has committed against Africa.

"Going back to the time before we were even a nation, European Americans received the fruits of the slave trade," Clinton told several thousand children and local residents in this rural town 20 miles from the capital, Kampala. "And we were wrong in that."

Clinton's statement stopped short of the explicit apology for past wrongs that some blacks in the United States have sought. But it was significant in that this was the president addressing this topic in this place, and, as he noted, "The United States has not always done right by Africa."

During the Cold War, America was so concerned with the Soviet Union that it dealt with African countries based on how they fit in the superpower struggle, rather than on more humanitarian criteria, Clinton said.



"But perhaps the worst sin America ever committed against Africa was the sin of neglect and ignorance," he said. "We have never been as involved with you, in working together for your mutual benefit, for your children and for ours, as we should have been."

Black Americans traveling with the president welcomed his remarks about Africa and history, though some called for Clinton to say even more,

especially this year, during which he has sought to call attention to racial dialogue and healing.

Discussing Clinton's remarks Tuesday, Randall Robinson, head of TransAfrica, a Washington, DC-based lobbying group that focuses on African and Caribbean issues, observed, "It's different from speeches of past presidents, so

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CLOSE ENCOUNTER: Forty-five feet down, dive instructor Mark Rayer encounters some inhabitants of Cabo Pulmo's reefs in Cabo Pulmo, Mexico. (Photo by Bob Carey.)

Making good on promises to pay Rubber checks issue comes under spotlight

By Ilham Sadeq

Star Staff Writer

BAD CHECKS today continue to increase in leaps and bounds. So far no solution has been found, or measure taken to put an end to this phenomenon. While some experts are arguing that the "bad checks" problem is the result of a shrinking economy and stagnating salaries, others blatantly attribute the writing of "bouncing" checks to a decline in moral standards.

Which ever way you look at it, the problem, which is creating many economic and social headaches, requires immediate action from bankers and legislators.

"This problem is a reflection of the economic depression, as some people or companies give what are called 'postponed checks' in the hope that sales will rise and more liquidity will become available," says Mr. Seif Eddin Abu Samed, general manager of the Arab Banking Corporation.

Parties involved in bad check cases are usually businessmen, companies, factories and even individuals. Shops that sell goods in installments often don't have sufficient funds in their accounts when it comes to paying their bills, so they write checks, knowing

that they will bounce, knowing that they can be prosecuted, but hoping that "business" will improve enough so they can make good on their promises to pay.

Available statistics by the Central Bank of Jordan show that 13,430 checks out of 720,434 traded, bounced in 1996. They are valued at JD 13,708,353 and JD 903,792,436 respectively.

In 1997, 717,625 checks were written, 15,409 of which bounced. Latest CBI figures show that in January alone 16,284 checks (valued at JD 21,813,891) out of 561,783 (valued at JD 853,755,390) bounced.

Sharing Abu Samed's view is economic analyst Dr. Youssef Mansour. He argues that checks are the sole available declaration that proves indebtedness. "There are no other tools for financing loans or for debts," Mansour told The Star. He said that the bad checks phenomenon is associated with the state of the economy. Whenever the economy slumps, the number of checks that bounce increases. When the economy revives, fewer checks bounce.

Unemployment and low income combined with a high cost of living are also responsi-

ble for this phenomenon. Dr. Munir Hamamneh, from the University of Jordan, attributes the bad check phenomenon to what he termed Jordan's economic recession.

"It is the result of a stagnant economy, one marked by weak purchasing power in the market, where there is slack demand and feeble movement in selling and buying," said Hamamneh.

The price of consumer goods rockets, while people's incomes do not increase; many remain unemployed. But official figures show otherwise, pointing to high growth levels while showing unemployment to be stabilizing. "It's true that there is growth, but it is not reflected in consumers' pockets," Hamamneh added.

However, the consequences of bad checks are not restricted to either broad economic impacts or to distorting the image and position of persons involved in these cases. They could plainly lose the dealers' trust and credibility in the market.

But a solution could still be reached. Banks must embark on a tough regimen to ensure that the phenomenon is slowed down and eventually stopped. "Measures that could be

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French neophytes go online

By Anne Swardson

PARIS—The longtime failure of the Internet to catch on here has often been blamed on the French distaste for spontaneity and hazard. So it was only fitting that this country's new drive to become wired was capped this weekend by an organized festival.

"La fête de l'Internet," it was called, and it drew thousands of curious French citizens. Exhibitions, discussions, presentations and lessons were offered at 600 locations in Paris and around the country.

The fête was kicked off by President Jacques Chirac, who as recently as a year ago did not know that

thing on the end of the computer cable was called a "souris" or mouse. This time, Chirac smoothly led an online discussion from the presidential Elysee Palace, which in the intervening year inaugurated its own Web site (www.elysee.fr).

The festival sites were fittingly French. Under the gilded ceilings of the legislative National Assembly (www.assemblee-nat.fr), beneath frescoes painted by Eugene Delacroix, visitors clustered around some 20 computer terminals and learned about pull-down menus and "moteurs de recherche" (search engines).

"Things are a little slow now because it's mid-afternoon 16th hours

ahead of Eastern Standard Time) and all the Americans are signing on," said a trainer to Benedicte de Changy, a young photographer and Internet neophyte.

"But that's in English," complained de Changy, pointing to an instruction that had popped up on the screen. Yes, the trainer explained, even though the number of French-language sites is increasing exponentially, you still need to know a few words of English to navigate "la Toile," or, as it is more often called in French, "le Net."

De Changy's session showed the difficulties of novice navigation. During an hour, she researched the euro, the planned European currency, and she found a list of painting competitions, monitored the official French weather site (www.meteo.fr)

and finally got lost in a Namibian newspaper site.

"I feel like I'm looking without finding anything. I don't quite see my niche in it," de Changy said after her session. "But I know I can't bypass it. I'm obliged to get on it."

Prime Minister Lionel Jospin agrees with her. In January he launched a large-scale effort to get France online. The government will spend nearly \$250 million to set up access points at post offices, libraries and museums, and to subsidize small-business to become wired. Government ministries, usually the last bastions against change in France, will have full Internet access.

The Matignon Palace, residence of the prime minister, also has its own

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Arab Bank presents budget, final account

AMMAN (Star)—

The Arab Bank Shareholders' General Assembly held its 68th meeting at the Arab Bank Building in Amman on Friday under the chairmanship of Mr. Abdul Majed Shoman, Chairman of the Board, and in the presence of the Comptroller at the Ministry of Industry together with Arab Bank shareholders from various Arab countries. The meeting discussed the general budget, the final accounts and the Board of Directors report. (See pages 7 to 13).



Locals look the other way at marriage test

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dren, although the number could reach to upwards of half a million," Dr Zumeili said. He has calculated that 57 percent of the all cases of child handicap is caused by marriage between relatives.

"If we want each new generation to be healthy, we must widen the scope of premarital testing to include larger segments of the population. The tests currently cost JD 50 each. This may seem expensive, but it's nothing compared to the JD 45,000 it takes to raise a single patient suffering from Thalassemia," Jordan had spent JD 1.5 million in 1995 for the care of patients suffering from Thalassemia, and the amount is increasing annually.

Dr Zumeili—a member of the Al Alai Society, which aims to spread out the costs of marriage by holding "group weddings"—pointed out that the high figures of diseases could be lessened if public awareness increased.

"We don't want to overly interfere with our social traditions and values. That's why the administration of the tests is a confidential process. Only the young man and woman to be married are given the details of the results," Dr Zumeili said that results are not even given to the couple's parents.

"Medically, we only say whether the couples are right for each other. Beyond that, we don't give out the spe-

cifics of any couple's test," Dr Zumeili said.

Medical testing before marriage is still a new process that began in Jordan in 1994. This may explain why people are still apprehensive about testing. "Doctors, hospitals, and medical testing still carry negative symbols in our society. Anyone who goes to a hospital is stigmatized as if something is immediately 'wrong' with him," said Dr Sari Naser, a sociology professor at the University of Jordan.

"We as a society don't have an extensive medical background, so we need a campaign to introduce these tests to the people in a logical way," Dr Naser called on officials to begin such a campaign immediately, beginning with schools and universities.

"We should reach out to those communities where the largest numbers of people of marriageable age are to be found," Dr Naser went on to say that romantic behavior should be balanced with a more appropriately pragmatic attitude.

"People about to marry say they believe in God and destiny; that's why they want to get married, regardless of all the risks that testing sometimes reveals," Dr Naser pointed out that these risks should be considered more seriously. Establishing a new family involves a high degree of responsibility, so parents should protect their family's future in advance.

But in Jordan there are those who refuse to listen to logic.

Many couples become engaged and later marry without the benefit of medical testing. By the time they realize that they are not medically 'right' for each other—after the birth of their first child—it may already be too late.

"Marriage isn't only for individuals, but is a fragile unity that develops over time, and gives birth to children, and needs protection and guarantee. So we must pay serious attention to what the medical tests reveal," Dr Naser stressed the importance of a baby's health and the responsibility of the family and the society as a whole to prevent debilitating disease from damaging the child's health, as well as the family and social structures in which it will mature.

Despite this, there is a great deal of reluctance to submit to pre-marital testing. But if medical science and reason can't convince people to protect their bodies and future children, maybe religion can.

"One of the Islamic religious intentions (sharia) is to keep living persons and future generations from any harm," said Dr Abdulla Al Kilani of the Sharia Faculty at the University of Jordan.

"Medical testing is one of many scientific means to prevent harm to bodies and futures before it occurs. This is in complete harmony with the principles of Sharia that are based on precaution," Dr Kilani explained.

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Deputies embroiled over fate of 'dead' press law

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Haddadin said that the Committee's decision was a middle ground compromise between his own suggestion "to respect the Court's decision and reject the law" and the government's wish that it is supported by some deputies who are asking the House "to ignore the Court's ruling and start debating the law like nothing had happened."

Nevertheless, criticism of the Committee's decision is widespread. Deputy Khalil Alneiyah expressed his bitterness, saying "the decision is like running away from reality. It would have been better for my colleagues to reject the law with respect to the Court's verdict."

Other deputies handed the Committee's decision "a mistake," Dr Muhammad Abu Hudieh said he was "hoping that the Committee would reject the law without hesitation on the condition that the government present a different draft law."

An increasing number of deputies believe that the House should take the initiative and draft a "civilized" law. This trend is based on the confidence these deputies have in the combined independence and coordination of the three branches of power in the country: the legislative, executive and the judicial.

Leading this trend is Mahmoud Al Kharashneh, who believes that Parliament, as stated in Article 83 of its bylaws, insures that the Lower House has the absolute authority and power to make decisions about, reject, or ratify, draft laws presented to it.

He believes that "The High Court ruling on the temporary press law had annulled activating the law without discussing its content, leaving that up to the House."

Kharashneh, also a member of the Committee, said based on the principle of the separation of powers, "we find ourselves in front of a unique situation concerning the temporary press law—that the House itself can initiate a draft press law that satisfies the country's needs."

However, Haddadin said that the "core of conflict between the House and the government is that we in the House refuse to be responsible for the government's mistakes, and we also refuse to ignore the judiciary's authority."

Political analysts believe that ever since the annulment of the temporary law by the Court, the fate of the draft law submitted to Parliament for ratification remains in question. Therefore, it is very much in the interest of the government to encourage the House to debate the temporary law.

According to informed

sources His Majesty King Hussein, in a private meeting that included Prime Minister Abdel Salam Al Majali and a number of first ranking judges, hesitated the proposal of several politicians advising that the government present a new draft law to Parliament.

Deputy Abdel Karim Al Daghmi, a fierce opponent of the temporary press law, said the "House must reject the law to comply with the Court's verdict." Al Daghmi, who is also a former minister of justice, added that "the government has no right to demand that the House ratify the law."

A number of legal experts, including Hussein Mijali, president of the Jordan Lawyers Association, and attorney Hani Dahla believe that the temporary law does not exist anymore. According to them, the High Court's ruling on it means that the 1993 Press and Publication Law is currently the active law.

They believe that the Lower House must return the temporary law to the government because it is illegal.

"It is up to the government. It can either submit it again just as it is, amend it or simply do nothing," Dahla said.

A Royal decree to dissolve the first legislative session, which ends on the 29th of this month, is expected within days.

Hot checks come under spotlight

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adopted include banning new accounts to any client unless he is recommended by one of our already respected customers, particularly if he requests a check book," Abu Samed said.

He suggests that someone charged with writing a bad check should be warned twice. The third time, their account will be closed and their name put on a black list.

Mansour suggests other options. First of these involves introducing a new computer system that gives complete data about persons involved in repeated check bouncing. The information collected through this system could then be shared with other banks so that they can be forewarned of potential problem customers.

Another solution is to reorganize the instruments to provide secure financing. "This means lending to clients on a long-term basis to guarantee that they will be able to repay the value of the checks and abide by their commitments," Mansour added.

Hamureh argued that the solution is to cut interest rates on loans and reduce taxes because such measures help during worsening economic times.

But some lawyers have a different view saying that the law must be tougher.

Mr Ibrahim Amout told The Star that had checks have a negative effect on economic and social fronts. It is because of this that amendments were made in the law. "Last year a five percent fine was imposed as a penalty. Even if the entire amount of the returned check is paid to the creditor, they must in addition pay this percentage."

However, the fine should not be less than JD 400. So, if a bounced check is worth only JD 50, the violator has to pay the government a minimum fine of JD 100. If the fine is not paid, the violator will face up to two years imprisonment.

Though many suggest that the problem has economic roots, Amout adds that there are other causes linked mainly to people's ethics. "Reasons, in addition to the above mentioned factors, include the morality aspect." Lack of legal background and insufficient knowledge about the law also adds to the escalation of the problem.

Among solutions suggested by Amout is one in which legislators force banks to amend their regulations in opening current accounts and issuing check books for clients. However, a solution like this is viewed by bankers as a tough one to put into practice.

Nevertheless, reinforcing people's legal awareness and knowledge of consequences may provide a deterrent to their actions.

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I think it's significant—but hardly adequate to address hundreds of years of slavery. While others are offered restitution and reparations for lesser crimes, the president does not manage anything but a cryptic acknowledgment.

Rohinson added that he thought Clinton was absolutely correct when he said that the great sin of America toward Africa was neglect.

But what both groups really want to see emerging from this trip is better relations between the nations of Africa and the United States.

On his 12-day tour of Africa, Clinton is trying to reverse America's past stance toward this continent. He hopes to create a new picture of Africa in American minds. To that end Tuesday, he visited the Kisumu primary school and was entertained by songs and dances of children in a lush, hilly setting overlooking banana fields.

Clinton: Africa victim of American domination

The topic of the day was education.

Clinton praised Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni for his efforts to boost education, tripling spending for schools over three years and increasing teacher salaries ninefold.

Museveni, who took over in a coup 11 years ago but since has won an election that outside observers deemed free and fair, has rid the country of many of the human rights abuses of the governments of Idi Amin and Milton Obote and instituted press freedoms and broad economic reforms.

Although Uganda does not have a multiparty democracy, Clinton and other administration officials stressed throughout the day that the country has come a very long way, and like much of Africa, deserves to be treated like a partner of the

United States.

Clinton also announced a three-part, two-year initiative to help African nations improve their schools, food supply and health care.

The education segment, which would cost \$120 million over two years, would provide teaching materials and computers with Internet access to resource centers across Africa. It would boost teacher training, establish links between African and American universities and improve education for girls, who traditionally get much less education than boys in many African countries.

The two-year, \$61 million nutrition program aims to better distribute existing crops, increase trade and investment in agricultural industries, attack crop diseases and boost access

to modern agriculture.

The effort to reduce malaria, which kills 2 million Africans annually, would focus on a \$1 million grant to support a regional center in Mali and boost educational efforts elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the president's historic tour continued in general excitement among Africans, especially the young with whom he visited Tuesday.

Caroline Nakyeuye, 14, who was dressed in a school uniform of a white blouse and blue skirt, asked of the president's swift stop: "Why has he spent only 30 minutes with us? We liked him so much, that's why we didn't want him to go."

Her schoolmate Nicole Sylvia, 17, added brightly: "We're glad about the \$120 million. I like the friendship he is creating between the United States and Africa."

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Tabloids provide Iraqis with new 'food for thought'

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ver games and soap operas are interrupted for live commentary by senior US officials, for example, on crises and issues of the day involving Iraq.

The public appetite for independent media appears sharp. Copies of about a half-dozen new newspapers, weeklies and his-eeklies, run by professional syndicates and Iraqi investors, are snatched by eager readers within hours of hitting the news kiosks. The latest publications sell out well before the official ones, though they cost four times as much.

Coverage in *Nabdh Al Shabab* (Pulse of the Youth), *Al Manqab* (The Future), *Al Jashar* (Arab Photography), *Al Inbad* (The Union), *Al Zawa* (The Round One, an old name used for the city of Baghdad) is sensationalist and alarmist. Acts of immorality, and petty crimes dominate their pages—as does coverage of administrative excesses.

Such criticism of the government would have been impossible when official dailies ruled the newsstands. "As long as the issues are not linked to major policy or guidelines coming from central authority, there seems to be acceptance and tolerance of criticism," said Faisal Yassiri, an Iraqi journalist and film producer. "The experience has proven to be therapeutic, too."

Naji Hadithi, an adviser to Information Minister Humam Abdel Khalil, describes the sitting old-guard newspapers, with their strong rhetorical bent and penchant for glossing over failures and personal detail, as "red death." In Iraq's new tabloid press, information about a collapsing bridge or overflowing sewers due to a department's neglect is news. These issues, Hadithi explained, are of "immediate concern. This is the bridge people take to work every day. All this was overlooked before."

Local scandals about party officials stealing public funds are displayed right alongside tales of sex and incest. The headlines are bold. The stories include facts, dates, names.



Iraq's new tabloids provide an alternative to the state run newspapers

Officials are taking note.

"Many officials fear these newspapers... You often spot these papers on the desks of senior public servants," said Yassiri, who manages the first non-Iraqi Arab television station in Iraq—Qatar-owned Al Jazeera, which airs live news from Iraq.

Photographs of two-headed babies, newborns without skulls and other birth defects are displayed on the front page with the names of hospitals and doctors who attended the deliveries. Official blame for the deformities is placed on malnutrition and sanctions. But with the threshold for truth rising, no story is being swallowed whole.

"They are not being candid about these birth defects. Are they due to American weapons or some substance recently destroyed in keeping with United Nations regulations?" asked one skeptic.

In addition to changing media policies, key officials have changed their media personas, as well. No longer are

their briefings too long, too rhetorical or too hard to digest. Spokesmen for the regime now arrive at news conferences armed with cogent arguments, talking points and buzz words. The sessions are scheduled before the evening news and are kept short and punchy.

"Iraq has entered the age of the sound bite," said Amjad Tadros, a CBS manager who just spent three months in Baghdad.

Yassiri said officials "have finally realized that the voice of Iraq is not being heard. It is not even reaching Iraqis, who tune in to the BBC and the Voice of America to find out what is going on."

Cable News Network, NBC and the BBC (hanned for five years) have established offices with official Iraqi blessing. Hadithi said, CBS is debating a similar move. Foreign networks no longer must drive their film 500 miles overland to Amman, Jordan, to link up with communications satellites, a trip more time-consuming than a trans-Atlantic flight. Now, more than 14 satellite uplink stations have been set up in Baghdad, and none is censored directly. However, information ministry officials closely monitor the content once it is on the air.

Hadithi is described as the brains behind the government's new approach, one of a group of Young Turks who recognize that Iraq's pariah status and isolation had left the world unmoved by its citizens' suffering under sanctions. It was on the eve of the latest crisis, which began brewing last November, that the information minister gave Hadithi new powers. Once overshadowed by hawks in his ministry who considered him too chummy with the Western press, Hadithi now can be found in his office until midnight, writing editorials for official papers, listening to requests from foreign journalists, granting visas and nudging local editors to push the envelope.

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W E E K



An unconventional report on Jordanian news and views edited by Marwan Al Asmar

Poverty

Minister of Social Development Dr Mohammad Kheir Mamsar was frank the other day when he said that between eight percent and nine percent of the population lie below the poverty line. And in that respect he said there are 400,000 people who are poor. That's about 50,000 families who are in need of assistance. He said that between 21 to 22 percent lie within the limited income category, and that if you translate these percentages, you have around 1 million individuals who are poor in the country, pointing out that "it's no secret." The minister said there is an equation for measuring the poverty line: Every family with eight members and a monthly income of JD 150 is considered to lie below the poverty line. But Dr Mamsar said this is not the only challenge, adding there are 130,000 people in the country who are handicapped, some of them severely. He said that his ministry provides welfare assistance to 20,000 of these people.

Deputies speak out

The majority of Lower House deputies are extremely angry with the government over the proposed changes in the Savings Funds. Sixty-eight deputies are calling on the government not to interfere in the funds. Acting Prime Minister Dr Abdullah Nsour said that "the government doesn't have a blueprint law in this direction," adding that if the private sector doesn't like the draft law, and is able to organize its affairs by itself, then the government would welcome that, and won't stick to its opinions. He denied that the government wants to impose a new law. The deputies had earlier stated that government intervention in the funds wouldn't lead to a solution, but on the contrary would lead to a disruption in the economic and security situation of the state. In a memo presented by Dr Abdullah Al Akaileh, the deputies added that the funds are best run by individual organizations and their own members, warning that the situation is critical.

Unrepentant

The latest visit of the Lower House deputies continues to reverberate on the local scene. However, it is having very little effect among members of Parliament. What is interesting is that the visit is increasing the threshold of the old psychological barrier that has dominated the relations between Jordanians and Israelis. Today, it can be argued that it's no longer "taboo" to visit Israel. People more to the point, our political representatives—are setting the tone and the political agenda. There is nothing wrong with that I suppose, but it does seem to be a certain contradictory attitude and perspective.

Hadadin

Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the attitude of Deputy Bassam Hadadin, who has long been a vociferous anti-normalizer, and has refused to endorse the Jordan-Israeli peace Treaty of October 1994. What is more interesting—perhaps even amazing—is that a couple of months before, Hadadin was the first to criticize deputies Hamadeh Faraneh and Shabih Mohammad Rafaat for their maiden voyage to the Israeli Knesset.

But here Hadadin is quick to point out that their visit was carried out as part of an individual initiative and wasn't "within a political, nationalistic framework," as he told *Ad Dustour*. This is indeed baffling, because here we have the leftist Hadadin believing not only in "nationalism," but in collectivism and collective action; to boot, fine again, but what would be the point of opposing the peace treaty, and normalizing at one stage, and supporting it at another. Again Hadadin says he believes in a just and comprehensive peace, but don't we all!

Islamist win

Elections to the 80-seat Student Council of the University of Jordan this week has brought in another Islamic win. With a high turn out, calculated at 77.1 percent, it was argued that the Islamists would again dominate the Council. Elections this year were held under the one-man, one-vote system despite opposition from Islamists. But this was argued by the University authorities as a much fairer way to reflect the student composition.

Murder

Unlike other countries, the number of murders committed in Jordan is far below the population growth. Assistant Director for Legal Affairs in the Public Security Department, Major General Mohammad Saeed Al Tarazi said that there is stability in the country. He pointed out that the number of murders to 1997 was 116 per 110,000. What is remarkable is that 93 percent of these murders were solved. Al Tarazi says that this shows the high success rate of the police.

Torture!

In the first case of its kind, a man went to the Family Protection Unit of the Amman Police Governorate complaining that his wife has been abusing his three boys, aged 5, 6 and 9. After an initial examination by the police doctor, it was found that the boys had been subjected to burns with a knife by their 27-year-old mother. After interrogations the mother confessed, stating that she put the knife over the fire and then put it on the bodies of her children. Her husband has another wife, who he married two months ago.

Stop the street vendors!

Petty traders will continue to be the talk of the town for many years to come. Are they a nuisance, or do they represent memories of yesteryear, of how things used to be? Either way, it seems they will always be picked on, not least by shop owners who are always complaining about the fact that street vendors drive business away from their shops. And these merchants appear to have the clout to drive the vendors away. A couple of months ago, they appealed to the Greater Amman Municipality to force the vendors out. To a certain extent, the Municipality obliged, and cleared the streets. Recently, shop owners—this time in Al Wihdat—began complaining again. Last week a delegation of shop owners went directly to the Mayor of Amman, Dr Mamduh Al Abbadi to complain about the same thing. He in turn promised to act. But in all honesty, how much longer can this cat-and-mouse game be allowed to continue; can't the shop owners adopt a "live and let live" attitude? Are street vendors really that much of a threat to these well established businesses, or are they just a minor nuisance?



His Royal Highness Prince Hassan with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Tuesday. The Prince said that the return of the peace process to its proper path goes hand in hand with European consultation with the countries of the region. Prince Hassan's short visit to Germany was preceded by a trip to the United Kingdom. Prince Hassan later continued to the United States.

Hot on the tail of drug smugglers

Crackdown, follow-ups and alternatives abound

By Ibtisam Awadat
Special to The Star

DRUG ADDICTION in Jordan has become a serious problem despite persistent efforts to curb the problem. Today the situation is worsening, and its need to be addressed is greater than ever before.

"Although no country in the world can police every inch of its borders, it is safe to say that 15 percent of those substances that are illegally entering the country never reach their destination," Col. Nazih Sharaydeh of the Anti-Narcotics Dept (AND) said.

The Colonel is one of the few activists in the field. His 10 years of experience and knowledge have pushed him to try every preventive tactic, especially decreasing the supply of drugs by reducing their demand. The use of the news media to increase public awareness is especially stressed.

AND recently issued up-to-date brochures explaining the harmful effects of drugs and are today calling on addicts to come forward for treatment.

"If an addict presents himself to any hospital or to the police and admits he is an addict, he will forgo punishment as stipulated by law. But if he is discovered by law, he will be prosecuted. Current law punishes convicted drug dealers with sentences as severe as death if he is a repeat offender, or if he is a member of an international gang," Sharaydeh noted.

The Colonel says in 1997 his department arrested 803 individuals suspected of dealing in drugs, adding that "we have confiscated 2,800,000 addictive tablets, 894 kilograms of hashish, 22 kilograms of opium, and 82 kilograms of heroin."

In dealing with smugglers, Jordan's main problems are two-fold. First there is the problem of the long, mostly desert, border it shares with Syria.

"Dealers carry the drugs through the desert on foot until they reach the border. There, they usually bury or hide them," explains Sharaydeh. "Deals are either made in advance so the drugs can be distributed immediately, or they are stored until customers are found either in Jordan or the neighboring countries."

Second, officials face real difficulties at the Ramtha and Jaber checkpoints.

"The number of cars, lorries and travellers going across the border is enormous and we can't inspect every single one. We depend instead on information we receive through our investigating agents about probable shipments of drugs."

Habitual drug use is not only harmful; it is expensive. It is an expensive habit, Sharaydeh said. "One gram of heroin costs a user JD 60-70."

Sharaydeh called on addicts to take advantage of treatment centers and asked their families to help by talking them into entering either a hospital or the National Center for Treatment of Addicts, an agency under AND supervision.

The center received 145 addicts in 1996/97. "Addicts stay at the center for two months. During this time, they realize that their lives are improving and that they are better off without their old habits. Of course, we must remember that they entered the Center voluntarily and were anxious to 'kick' their habits," Sharaydeh mentioned that there are now eight cases at the Center, and that the success rate is encouraging.

He also noted that for those who prefer to be cured without police supervision, the Ministry of Health has recently announced that it plans to establish a governmental addiction treatment hospital in Shafa Badran.

Viewing the problem from a different angle, Sharaydeh puts some of the blame on doctors and pharmacists.

"Our findings indicate that 70 percent of addicts were 'medicating' themselves on drugs they got their doctors to prescribe. Some pharmacists were even selling it directly across the counter with no prescription."

"Addiction is a word which is not used any more in the medical profession. Nowadays, we use the word 'dependency,'" said Dr Waleed Al



Drugs shipment impounded by AND

Sarhan, a well-known psychiatrist and chief of Al Rashid Hospital.

Dr Sarhan divided dependency into two classifications. "First, we have physical dependency, a more severe problem, that may lead to hallucinations and physical pain."

The second type is psychological. This means the addiction isn't physiologically dependent, but develops a habitual mental or emotional craving for pleasure.

"Each case of addiction is entirely different and depends on such things as the duration of intake as well as the quantities that were taken each time."

For example, in just three days of injection, you can probably become addicted to heroin. But even a couple of weeks on heroin is an easier habit to 'kick' than the eight or 11 years on particular kinds of tranquilizers.

Changing addiction involves a change in attitude. "Addiction and dependency start like a behavior and end as an illness. If we treat the illness but not the behavior, we can't expect much improvement."

Dr Sarhan considers the decision and will power of the addict to get off the drugs as the first step towards a cure. "Addiction centers worldwide face problems of addicts coming in and out after staying only eight weeks; once they reach the doorstep on their way out of the hospital, they immediately start again," Sarhan said.

"In Jordan, and in our experience in Al Rashid Hospital over the last 20 months we have achieved good results, a recovery rate of 60 percent, which internationally is very good."

Hospitals and addict treatment centers are occasionally targeted by drug dealers who become angry when they hear that one of their old customers is 'kicking the habit.' When the ex-addict gets out, the dealer will be right there, ready to provide him with plenty of free samples.

In this context, Sarhan noted that he has received many threats demanding that he stop operating in the fight against addiction.

"Jordan was always considered a transit area, but over the last 10 years there has been a change. The available amounts of some drugs have increased up to 10 times," Sarhan said.

What is needed to stop this dilemma is a National Committee, chaired by a top ranking official to give it the necessary executive power, Sarhan recommended.

"A lot of decision-makers won't be convinced that we are facing a crisis... Some officials think that psychiatrists are exaggerating the problem, but they aren't," Dr Sarhan said his interview with *The Star* could be his last, since he doesn't see any positive response.

Shbeilat's defence strikes hard

✶ The Press and Publications Dept. (PPD) officially requested all newspapers in the country not to run any news or disclose information related to the case of Mr Laith Shbeilat, a government critic, who was arrested 20 February on charges of inciting riots in Ma'an last month.

The Director of the PPD, Mr Bilal Al Tal relayed his request to the press on an official order from the State Security Court Prosecutor General Ma'moun Khasawneh, who asked newspapers, through the PPD, to adhere to Article 42 of the press law, which bans the publishing of materials related to court sessions unless the trial is over or if the court permits.

However, the defense attorney of Shbeilat on Sunday contested the validity of such an order.

Hussein Mijali said the March 19 decision was illegal and violated the Constitution, which he said guarantees freedom of expression in the Kingdom and grants newspapers the right to express their views in writing. He added that "the order has no legal grounds and should not be considered. Its contents should be disregarded."

In referring to Article 42, as mentioned by the state prosecutor, Mijali said "we do not find any text that supports this order. On the contrary, Article 15 of the Constitution requires that the state guarantee freedom of opinion and allows newspapers to express their views freely in writing and other means of expression," said Mijali in a press statement.

Mijali, who is also the president of the Jordanian Lawyers Association, considered the State Prosecutor's decision to ban news on his client as "an infringement of public freedoms" which are guaranteed by the Constitution and noted that it strengthens the government's hand in suppressing freedom of the press.

Mijali stressed, "It is a condition that the judiciary remains independent and neutral and enjoy immunity, without which the defense cannot perform its duty and achieve justice. He again emphasized that "the absence of such a condition transforms the judge into an adversary and afterward, there can be no advantage for the defense and its mission, and as a result, justice will not be served."

An ex-president of the Jordan Engineers' Association, Shbeilat was arrested while on his way back from Ma'an on February 20. Shortly afterwards, pro-Iraq protesters began demonstrating in the city. They clashed with police, and in the ensuing confusion, one Jordanian was killed while approximately 25 others were injured. A six-day curfew was enforced in Ma'an by the government, who claimed Shbeilat was responsible for the riots.

Mijali is one of three attorneys representing Shbeilat. His trial is scheduled to begin sometime in early April. A final date for the beginning of the proceedings is not yet available.

French neophytes go online

Continued from page 1

Web site (www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr). But when asked if he were a computer user, Jospin responded: "I have a computer on my desk. But these days, I haven't had much time to click away at it."

In all of France, polls show, only 350,000 people are adept at using the Internet. Some 1 million computers are on-line, 750,000 of them in businesses. France is less wired than the United States, but also less wired than Britain, Germany and other major countries in Western Europe.

The Internet has been seen as "something for research or a place where you find everything except what you need," said Laurent Sorbier, head of technology for the French government's strategic planning institute, at the institute's exhibition on "cyberbureaucrats." "But we have a strong dynamic of catch-up... The tool is so open, so interesting, I don't think there is any more reticence."

Certainly computer sales have climbed, more than doubling last year to around 700,000. French Internet sites have increased as well. There are now sites for cheese (www.fromages.com) in English and French, foie gras (www.newtechr.fr/foiegras/) in French only and many major wines. Most major corporations have Web sites, and individuals, almost always young, are starting to create their own home pages.

The two-day festival, which ended Saturday, was considered a huge success. It featured not just introductions to Internet technology, but many French-style examinations of the new world. At the Patisserie on the Left Bank, for instance, last Friday evening's debate was "The French language: Does it mix with the Internet?" A handily terminal meanwhile, displayed some of the many government-sponsored cultural sites available in French.

Associations of trial lawyers participated in a mock trial in the 17th-century national court building on the Ile de la Cite. The defendant was the Internet, played by a young, blonde actress. The charges: She wasted time, infringed on privacy, widened society's disparities, and spread pornography. More than 65 people played roles in the proceedings, which adhered to the strict rules of French criminal procedure.

"Only you," thundered the lawyer for the prosecution to the jury, "can prevent the Internet from creating a new race of slaves... It destroys all. Our penal code no longer allows for the death penalty, or I would request it for the Internet."

The tone was tongue-in-cheek, but lawyer Olivier Icau, who came up with the idea of a mock trial, said the issues were real. "We have lost the taste for debate when it comes to the Internet," he said. "There is a very strong fashion for it; this is a useful debate. Besides, it will help catch the judicial world up on computers. We are way behind."

The verdict: not guilty of wasting time, guilty of infringing liberty and disseminating porn. Sentence: disconnection with probation, providing she behaves better in the future. ■

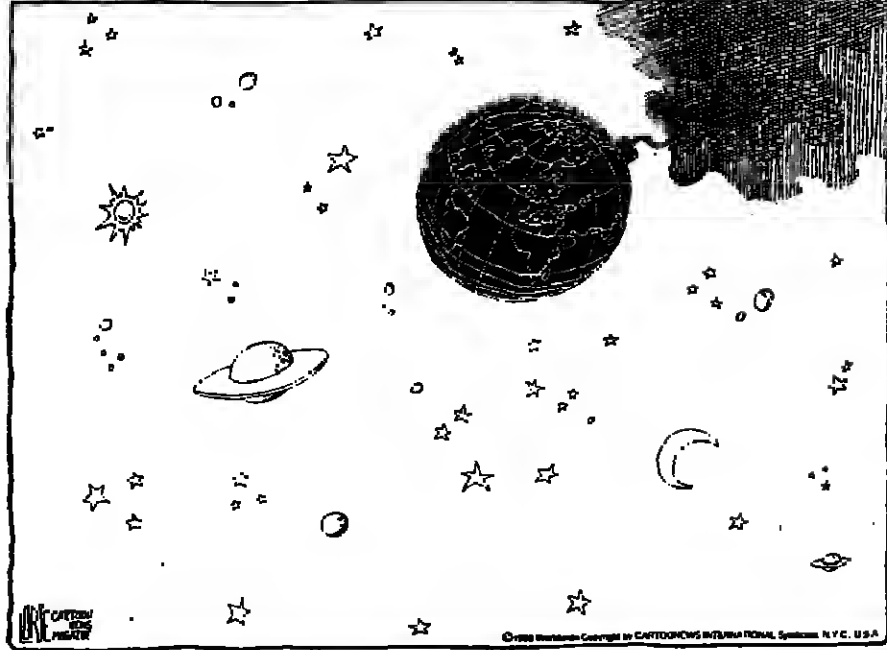
LA Times-Washington Post
News Service

Returns Are Stronger ..
Lufthansa's service will be in Jordan ..

30th of March.



Lurie's NewsCartoon



Our Say...

Making up their mind on the press law

THE SPECTER of the ill-fated temporary Press and Publications Law is looming again with its nefarious pronouncements on the freedom of the Jordanian press. Its rejection by the High Court earlier this year on the grounds of its unconstitutionality should have spelt the end of this controversial enactment which threatened one of the pillars of Jordanian democracy. But less than two months after it was abrogated by the highest court in the land, the issue is once more forcing itself on the national agenda.

The National Guidance Committee of the Lower House has failed to disavow itself from the disputable draft after it was nullified by the court and is still looking into it before making its recommendation to the people's deputies. If the committee accepts the temporary law, it will then be referred to the legal committee and go through the normal legislative channels with a chance of getting adopted as a permanent law by both houses of parliament.

The fact that the draft law was not turned down is already setting a precedent and is a subject of lengthy legal debates. It has to do with the integrity of the High Court, the authority of the Lower House and with the thorny issue of the separation of powers.

At the heart of the matter are basic constitutional issues. The process of legislation starts with the government submitting draft laws to the Lower House for approval. Both Houses debate each bill, amending, approving and deleting articles before passing or rejecting draft laws. The highest of the three branches of government, the judiciary, becomes involved only after the draft law has been passed. What happened in the case of the temporary press law is that the process was mixed up. The High Court examined the law in the absence of Parliament and later made a ruling on it while it was still in the hands of the Lower House.

The High Court ruling shook the government and embarrassed the deputies. But as long as the draft was still in the Lower House, the government had a chance to push it through. At present the nine-member National Guidance Committee seems to be deadlocked over the fate of the temporary law.

What makes a ruling on the law difficult is the fact that it was nullified by the High Court, not for its content, but for the reasons that brought it to be, which the court did not accept. Because of this, the National Guidance Committee is finding it difficult to allow the draft to continue on to the Lower House. On the other hand, government pressure to push the draft through is tremendous. A third way exists, which could probably end the crisis. It is for the government to withdraw the draft and then work on a new one, if necessary, to be submitted later to the Lower House.

The lawmakers will find a way. We are not worried about the legal entanglements of the case, but about the political implications of allowing such a bill to come back to life. The deputies should observe the High Court ruling, but they should also remind themselves that the temporary law constituted a reversion from democracy and a free press. This should be enough to make them move quickly to kill any chance for the same law to make a legitimate come back.

Letters to the Editor

A word of advice

To The Editor,

I am a frequent reader of *The Star* over the Internet, and read most of your weekly issues to keep up with the Jordanian scene due to the comprehensive coverage that you provide.

I am therefore used to your usual standard of non-bias and excellence in correspondence and fair reporting. However, in your 19 March Technology Section—specifically the review of the Galleria Web Site—I believe you strayed slightly.

I have visited the site as a result of your report and was sadly disappointed with what I found. The opening home page was missing, and then the de-

sign seemed to drift and every other page was on a different theme. To make things worse, 50 percent of the images did

not load. I follow the work of most of the web designing companies in Jordan, like Arabia Online, BOC and AccessArabia and I am very proud of the standard they have delivered and some

of the international awards they have received, as well as the recognition they have gotten in the Middle East.

So in the name of fair play I would ask that you review some of their work as well, and give your readers the benefit of experiencing what the Jordanian Web production industry is really all about. Do keep up the good work and I hope you will take this point in a positive manner, as I am proud of what all you guys are doing and want you to keep it up.

Regards,
"Bushar" Dahabra
<dahabra@hotmail.com>



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The struggle for the Caspian

By Christian Doumit

ASIDE FROM the Gulf, Central Asia is at present the most important focal point for international energy diplomacy. There are huge reserves of oil and gas and no way to get these out to consumer markets except through lengthy export pipelines transiting unstable territories. Thus Central Asia is fast becoming the chessboard for global and regional powers in the 21st century, marking the revival of the "Great Game" between colonial powers which had stopped during seven decades of Soviet Communist rule over the area.

Complex maneuvering between the US and Russia is being matched by their respective regional allies, Turkey and Iran. The risks are high for the small players which have become involved in the Great Game as a result of their geographical position or their energy resources. They must choose between one of the two sides, and the price of making the wrong choice could range from economic isolation to political de-stabilization.

The Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC), a consortium including US oil majors Amoco, Exxon and Penzoil, British Petroleum, and Russia's Lukoil are considering a Russian route (via Chechnya to the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk) as well as another pipeline crossing Georgia to export oil from its Azeri offshore oil development project. Russia does not want the Georgian or Turkish route to become the main channel for AIOC's exports as that would boost Ankara's strategic leverage at Moscow's expense.

Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan are ambivalent about both the Russian and the US approaches. They want to reduce their dependence on Russia, while at the same time they do not want to alienate it by moving too close to the US. All three are involved in delicate balancing acts. In practice, however, their balancing involves a shift towards the US. From Moscow's perspective, this shift is seen as being achieved at the expense of Russian interests.

US diplomacy appears to be focusing on the idea that energy exports from the Caspian states must bypass Russia as much as possible to reduce their economic and political dependence on Moscow. Conversely, Russian diplomacy is aimed at retaining maximum political and economic influence over the former Soviet Muslim republics. While it is unable to do this through financial or technological incentives, Moscow's critics say it is resorting to de-stabilization tactics to remind former Soviet republics not to ignore Russian interests. The failed machine-gun-and-grenade assassination attempt on Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia on 9 February is seen as one example of such tactics. On 10 February, Shevardnadze blamed "powerful oil fires" for the assassination bid. He was hinting at Russia, which opposes any move to bypass the pipeline network built during the Soviet era.

Thus Shevardnadze's death could have damaged prospects for the Georgia-



Turkey pipeline, which is favored by the US. Georgia is an important potential transit route for energy exports by bypassing Russia through pipelines from the Caspian to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. American special agents and forensic experts arrived in Georgia a couple of days later and began examining the assassination site. The attempt on his life is likely to make him more determined to distance Georgia from Moscow's influence.

Amid the new developments, it is becoming increasingly clear that Iran is building up a strong position in the Great Game. This is because (i) apart from Russia, it is the only stable country in the region with access to the open sea, as it straddles both the Caspian and the Gulf; (ii) it has land borders with both Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan; (iii) it has a large energy infrastructure. There are four Iranian refineries just over Azerbaijan's border and Iran's export terminal at Kharg Island, which currently handles up to 2.5 million barrels per day, could take in more. Moreover, overland pipeline transit through Iran would get the oil to a part of the world where it can easily move east or west by sea.

Depending on how the main AIOC pipeline is routed, one of several rival states will have great influence if not

outright control over the Caspian's energy resources. AIOC must balance the geo-political risks with what makes the most business and geographical sense.

Finding the right export pipeline is a major problem for AIOC given both the political and commercial risks. Both the Russian and Turkish routes pose problems with outstanding conflicts. The only one that makes sense is the Iranian route, which the US opposes. Current alignments have the US and Turkey on one side and Russia and Iran on the other. With a thaw in relations between the US and Iran, things could change dramatically. Of course, Russia and Turkey would be the losers in the event of improved ties between Iran and the US. If US sanctions on Iran are lifted, Iran could emerge as a major transit point for export pipelines from the Caspian basin. This is because exports from the Caspian Sea can be routed via Iran to Turkey and the Mediterranean, or directly to the Gulf where the US Sixth Fleet stands ready to assure the security of shipping lanes. Having failed to contain Iran, Washington's policymakers are now recognizing the strategic advantages of improved relations. Potential benefits range from greater stability in the Gulf, with Tehran back in its old role, from counter-balancing Baghdad, to outmaneuvering Russia. Since Iranian President Mohammad Khatami took office in August, the atmosphere between the US and Iran has been steadily improving. Of course this means the US would have to rescind Iran's "rogue" nation status.

In terms of geo-economics, Washington faces no threats to its industry from Central Asian oil and gas exports. In fact, diversification of sources of supply away from the Gulf countries would tend to increase world energy market stability and thus bolster the US economy even further. US allies, including Turkey and the EU are mainly markets for exports from Central Asia. They are only buyers and have no major competitive or market shares issues to consider. Future market share is one of the main reasons both Russia and Iran want export pipelines from Central Asia to cross their territories; that would give them considerable leverage over the exporting countries while at the same time generating revenues through transit fees. The US position is more subtle—it doesn't rule out the Russian route but has so far opposed the Iranian route, though this may change in the coming years. Washington prefers pipelines via Turkey to the Mediterranean, Georgia to the Black Sea, or Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Arabian Sea. A popular slogan among Central Asian states says "happiness in multiple pipelines"—a concept more in line with the US approach than that of Russia.

Christian Doumit is an energy consultant based in Amman. The remarks in this article were taken from his paper "Political Risk in Pipeline Projects" which was delivered on the occasion of the Annual Pipeline Congress in Dubai last year.

Story of the moral

Essays on Moral Philosophy, by Michael Ignatieff
Reviewed by Ilana Ber-El

KNOWLEDGE is a distasteful matter. In the final essay of this collection, Michael Ignatieff refers to Freud's distinction between intellectual and emotional knowing, between "knowing and knowing." Using it as a lynch-pin, he journeys through the world of attempted reconciliation in post-conflict situations, where truth is often disclosed but not accepted.

It is interesting, but not entirely to the point. For the real issue is the conscious distinction between knowing and not knowing. The commonplace is that knowledge is dangerous, or a means of power: it has actually become a major source of anxiety. Avoiding knowledge has become the act of will which the pursuit of it once was. We now have a determined decision not to read the paper, not to watch television, not to surf the Internet, not to become exposed to facts, events, problems or anything else that may impede upon the even keel of our lives. But it is difficult: we are constantly exposed to the knowledge of pain, horror and disorder. As a result, we have become bereft of that famous excuse: we didn't know.

Western guilt with respect to genocide is implicit throughout the book, compelling the acquisition and acknowledgement of knowledge. It is sought out in hell holes, those corners of the world in which people have chosen to devolve into war rather than accept the enlightened path of universal liberalism. Through a series of themes, it is reflected back upon western society that observes these horrors, sometimes intervenes, but ultimately does not care enough. It is turned over, redefined in moral terms and sometimes convoluted into opaque philosophical prose.

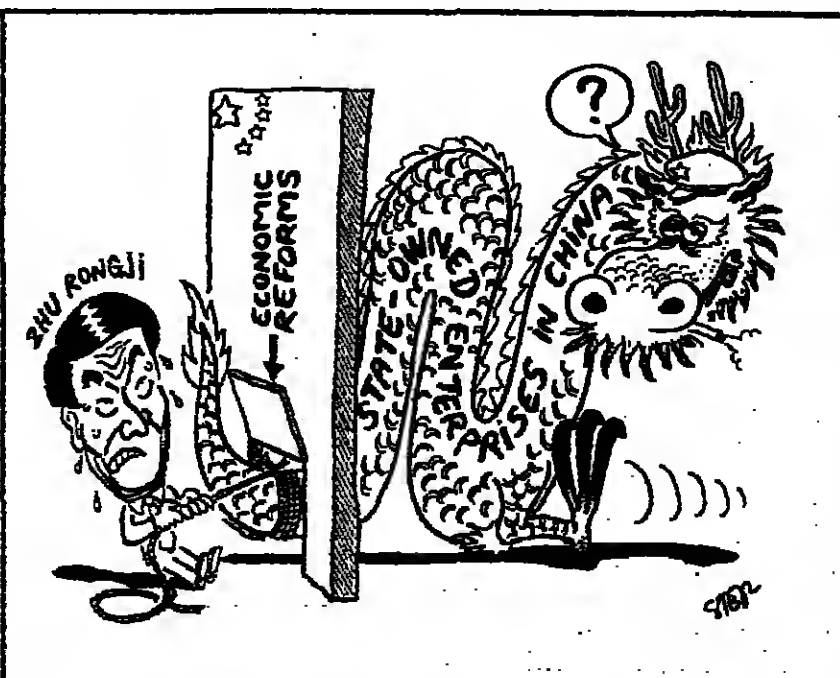
Ultimately, this massive collection of data and analysis is overwhelming and, for all its stated compassion, rather detached. Ignatieff chooses the big themes: nationalism, war and ethnicity. Each is pondered from every aspect: aggressors and victims, leaders and individual citizens, host populations and intervening forces, philosophers and implementers, politicians and soldiers. The result is a litany of inadequacies: in logical analysis every vantage point

is flawed, often factually and always morally. In other words, there is little good in the world or in humanity; and such natural inclinations are exacerbated and allowed to emerge when long-standing civic and state structures fall apart.

The essays are most preoccupied with the western inclination to say "something must be done" about the wars that rage in the post-cold war, post-colonial world. Or rather, that the huge and intricate structure of international organizations that are meant to "do something" do not do it very well. Possibly in the face of such inadequacy, the author sets out to do something: to traverse the gulf between west and non-west, between apparent apathy and repulsive action, by visiting the war zones.

It is a brave step, yet one that also highlights the basic flaw of the book: he constructs a moral philosophical vision with which he ventures into reality, and tries to make the two measure up. Reality usually comes out by far the worst, largely because it cannot be reduced into perfect lines of logic. Yet it is reality that prevails.

In a latent way this is brought home in the best piece in the book: "The Seductiveness of Moral Disgust," in which Ignatieff accompanies the then UN secretary general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, through the ravages of Africa, while Srebrenica is falling in Bosnia. It is a marvelous contrast, in which he contemplates not only by the actual existence of genocide, but also the pragmatic attitude of Boutros-Ghali and other aid workers. They did not seem to care enough; they had descended into Conrad's Heart of Darkness, like Kurtz despairing that "the brutes" were worthy of preservation. In his well-balanced way, he analyses and understands this attitude too—but not really. Given that what is being done by aid agencies is far from enough; even if it is not the fault of the actual field workers, the least they can do is appear to be caring. There is a huge difference between caring and doing; in order to do, one must care; but in order to do constantly, consciously caring is a relief, an occupation of repose. Not everyone has the luxury of repose.

Middle East Beat
by Khairi Janbek
Turkey and democracy

ALMOST NO time has passed after the democracy crisis in Turkey—between the Erbakan-Ciller coalition and the National Security Council in Turkey—than another pops up, as Mr Yilmaz meets the all-powerful Turkish National Security Council. The political, and diplomatic skills of the Turkish Prime Minister are not in question, but the role of the Turkish military is gaining importance in defining the parameters of maneuverability for politicians, and prime ministers.

What has sparked the recent tension is Yilmaz' statement when he said that although Turkey is a Muslim country, and Turks are proud of their heritage, religion must not be used as a tool to promote political ideas, or an excuse to undermine the state's democratic principles. Initially, the statement was directed towards the political-Islamist groupings in the country, and towards the re-organized Refah Party, party of virtue. But the statement went further, talking about the military attitude, which is traditionally viewed as guardian of the Kemalist state.

Mr Yilmaz alluded in his statement to the fact that the army shouldn't also use the excuse of the so-called Islamist threat to strengthen its bargaining position and threaten to move against the status quo. It is not apparent why Yilmaz has committed himself to such a position, but it seems that the ghost of the failed Erbakan-Ciller coalition is behind it, despite the fact that it was this failure that brought him to power in the first place.

The response of the military was circumspect under the circumstances and the head of the Chiefs of Staff commented that the military enters the profession with honor and leaves it with honor. This indicates that the crisis will be limited to an exchange of words.

Perhaps, Yilmaz is trying to alter the position of the military as the final arbiter in Turkish politics, most probably in response to the recent EU effort of Turkey's request to join the Community. His recent sweeping statement is a likely signal to the western powers that he not only considers the Islamist forces in the country—and the military—as potential dangers to the democratic institutions of the country, but that he is willing to do whatever must be done to strengthen those institutions to fit within the EU's formula for democratic stability to join this club.

But Yilmaz must not forget that the West is also worried about potential instability within the social structure of a NATO ally. More importantly, they also worry about the threat which any Islamist movement may pose to their own strategic interests.

The dilemma facing Turkey's democratic partners is their preference for a state that is completely free of all Islamist threats. Consequently, the secular/Islamic dichotomy in viewing the current Turkish situation is likely to persist in the future. Democracy and secularism in a convenient "hand-in-glove" fit are the most obvious ingredients for prospective EU membership. Democracy is represented by Yilmaz' current government, but the bulwark of secularism—and its anti-Islamist policies—is clearly the role of the Turkish military.

The question of human rights in terms of the Turkish military's handling of secular/Islamist issues presents the West with a conundrum, since they may privately wish for a Turkey free of Islamist influence, while publicly demanding an improvement of Turkish human rights before they'll consider EU membership.

Ultimately—and despite the West's wishes—the whole affair is a Turkish one. One hopes that the echoes of the government will compliment that of the Turkish army, as a stable Turkey provides stability to the region. Nevertheless, a major player in the area must also bear certain regional responsibilities.

Business scene

■ A \$4 million loan has been allocated for the finance of numerous development projects to the southern parts of the Kingdom for the period 1998 to 2002. The project's strategy is aimed at enhancing individual and joint ventures and productive enterprises in Karak, Wadi Musa, Ma'an, Tafaleh and Aqaba and other neighboring rural and Bedouin communities. The loan will also help transform small income-generating projects into bigger, long-term enterprises. Much attention is being given to small or micro projects that are carried out by women. Such financial services are aimed at reducing unemployment and boosting social stability in the south.

■ Ten global financial companies have submitted offers to provide consultation to the government in the selling of its 33 percent stake in the Jordan Cement Factories Co. Among the companies are the giant HSBC group, Fleming Corp, Societe Generale de Paris, Merrill Lynch Corp, Credit Commercial de France and Citibank in addition to a brokerage firm (EPG Hames) and an affiliate to the KGMG auditing company.

■ The general assembly of the Middle East Touristic Investment Company (METICO), is recommending that the company merge with the Arab-Jordanian Investment Co as a way to increase the former's capital. METICO's paid-up capital is JD 11.07 million. It has already started its drilling operations to build a five-star four-seasons hotel in cooperation with a Canadian company. Actual operations will begin next August. The project is due to be completed by the year 2000.

Packaging industry unfolds with surprising success

By Ilham Sadeq
Star Staff Writer

ON THE threshold of its first anniversary, the Jordanian branch of the Institute of Packaging—which saw the light as a result of the cooperation of JEDCO and the Institute of Packaging/UK—continues to develop the Jordanian Packaging and Packaging Sector.

The first of its kind in the Middle East, Jordan's IOP was opened in May 1997. Its activities in that year focused on the following areas:

The organization of two intensive programs offering diplomas conducted by IOP/UK. The first was held in May '97 and introduced a "Packaging Technology" course along with suggestions for studying methods for such "Open Learning" course.

The second, held last December, helped students assess their progress, clarify uncertainties, and get ideas for solutions to problems in the industry.

A Dutch paper-and-board expert, Mr. Richard Bartels, was hosted last November to conduct two lectures. These concerned the manufacturing process of paper, its types, characteristics, methods of testing and related areas.

The FDA Associate Director

of the Middle East and Africa, Mrs. Mary Tyson, visited Jordan last December to give a lecture on the laws and regulations of the FDA concerning packaging materials and their uses.

Monthly meetings were organized for students aimed at giving them opportunities for discussion, exchanging ideas on the material and encouraging studying progress.

Field visits for the students, covering subjects of the course, were carried out and included the Jordan branches of the Danish Food Industries Co, Arab International for Food & Oil Processing Co, Agricultural Marketing & Processing Co (AMPCO), the National Industries Company, the Arab Company for Cardboards, and the Al-Egbal for Printing & Packaging.

The branch also hosted a Japanese Food Packaging expert, Mr. Kazuaki Ohira, in December '97, in cooperation with JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization), to give a workshop on Flexible Packaging for Food Industries. In addition, they visited a selected group of food manufacturing companies and packaging industries, who offered free consultation on various issues of concern. These included the United Confectionery & Food

Co: Nutridar, Packaging Industries Co, Modern Flour Mills, Adnan Khudari & Sons Ltd., and National Multi Engineering Industries Co.

As a further step, a collection of technical books was brought in from IOP/UK to begin a library specialized in packaging technology. Next on the new library's agenda is increasing the collection and subscribing to periodicals to make available the latest up-to-date information in the field.

In other fields, the Malta Development Corp (MDC) is attempting to gain the financial and technical support of the European Union to establish a Regional Food Packaging Center for a number of Middle East countries including Malta, Jordan, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. This will bolster regional economic ties and gain the support of other interested parties. Within this context, representatives from the Jordanian Branch of the Institute of Packaging paid visits to both the Commercial Section of the British Embassy in Amman and Japan Institute of Packaging (JPI)-Tokyo.

Mr. Moayad Samman, the Branch's board chairman—and also the director of the Export Development Department of JEDCO—highlighted its plan for 1998. He said that the

objectives of the Jordanian branch for 1998 are focused on many areas, and these include establishing a "data base" for the Jordanian Packing and Packaging sector and surveying their needs, which will then be reflected in the Branch's plan.

Part of this activity has already been launched in January 1998 in the form of a field study. A questionnaire was designed for the Printing and Packaging companies to collect the necessary information regarding their capital, number of employees, range of products, machinery and raw materials used, and production capacity. It also suggested issues of concern to be addressed by the IOP/Jordan. The questionnaire was sent to all printing and packaging companies and some have already completed and returned the questionnaire.

This is in addition to a promotional program aimed at both local and international audiences. Articles about the industry are to be published in local newspapers and a web site for the Branch is currently



Samman

being designed. For 1998, JOP/Jordan is holding six to eight seminars and workshops, to be conducted by national and international experts—in collaboration with JEDCO—on various sectors of packaging. The subjects to be covered are directed by the findings of the field study which was carried out during January-February '98. The seminars and workshops will be scheduled on a monthly basis beginning April.

Other scheduled activities are as follows: ■ Building up a collection of technical video films for showing on a bi-monthly basis and dedicating time for the exchange of ideas and solutions to existing problems in the industry.

■ Organizing a "Best Pack Design" contest on the local level with the support and advice of IOP/UK on how to conduct such an event.

■ Organizing a packaging exhibition and conference for 1999 at the international level in co-operation with IOP/UK, with fund raising to support Branch activities.

■ Expanding the local Branch library book collection as well as increasing subscriptions to monthly/quarterly packaging magazines.

■ Arranging field visits for students to various sectors of the packaging industry within the Kingdom.

Mr. Samman concluded by saying, "We hope that the activities of the Branch and its plan for 1998 will be able to further promote the international co-operation between Jordan and the United Kingdom, especially within the new era of Euro-Mediterranean partnership." Additionally, he hopes to "advance public education in, and to improve the technology of, packaging in all aspects, to the benefit of the public."

Oil coalition to cut production

By Martha M. Hamilton

A COALITION of some of the world's most powerful oil producers said Sunday they will cut back production to stop a sharp slide in petroleum prices.

Three nations that account for about a fifth of the world's oil output—Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Mexico—issued a joint statement in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, saying they and other oil producers planned to reduce output by as much as 2 million barrels a day, or about 2.7 percent of world production.

The unusual show of solidarity by producers inside and outside the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries is expected to send oil prices climbing when trading resumes perhaps by \$1 to \$4 a barrel, some analysts said.

But even if oil producers reduce production, oil prices will continue to experience some downward pressure from a slowdown in demand because of Asia's financial crisis, the warm winter in the United States and Europe, and anticipated increased oil shipments from Iraq under a United Nations agreement.

Low oil prices are good for industrialized, oil-consuming nations such as the United States, where they translate into lower prices for gasoline and other products, help keep inflation at bay and provide a stimulus for economic growth.

Oil prices on the New York Mercantile Exchange last week dropped briefly to less than \$13 a barrel, the lowest price in 10 years, to close last Friday at \$14.32. Even if oil prices strengthen because of the production cutback, they are unlikely to reach anything approaching a high early last year of more than \$26 a barrel.

If low oil prices are good for consumers, they have the opposite effect on nations that depend heavily on oil production income. When oil prices fall, countries such as Mexico are forced to make painful budget cuts.

The agreement Sunday resulted from years of the impact of lost oil revenue on national budgets, oil-industry consultant Daniel Yergin said. "We've been hearing from very worried treasury and finance ministers who were taken by surprise at the severity of the drop in oil prices," he said.

Indications began to emerge last week that oil-producing nations were unwilling to continue to watch prices fall. Oil ministers from Norway and Mexico—two major exporting nations that are not members of OPEC—met during the week to discuss energy policy, and Venezuela, Mexican and Saudi oil ministers met in the Saudi capital over the weekend.

"Venezuela has taken the lead now because they are scared," said Vahan Zayoyan, president and chief executive of the Petroleum Finance Co., an industry consulting firm, Venezuela's reluctance to reduce its production had it at odds with Saudi Arabia in recent months.

"Now there is an honest, genuine effort within the group to regroup," Zayoyan said.

Saudi Arabia, Mexico and Venezuela Sunday issued a joint statement saying they agreed to "cooperate with the remaining members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and other producers from outside OPEC to remove the oversupply in the market by between 1.5 and 2 million barrels (2.7 percent of world supply) of oil per day."

The three nations said they already had pledged that they would reduce oil production by 1 million to 1.5 million barrels a day starting 1 April and that they anticipate additional reductions. Saudi Arabia said Sunday it would cut its output by 300,000 barrels a day. Mexico said it would cut production by 100,000 barrels a day and Venezuela committed to reduce its production by 200,000 barrels a day.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Arab Land Bank Facilities at your fingertips

THE ARAB Land Bank is one of the oldest financial institutions in Jordan. During its 51-year history, the Bank has gone from strength to strength. Today it provides customers with across the board services. It has just signed two agreements worth JD 678,000 with the Jordan Mortgage Refinance Company at an interest of 9.5 percent. This is subject to an annual review and would be in accordance with the prevailing market interest rates.

The first agreement, worth JD 375,000, secures refinancing for housing loans granted by the bank to its clients. The second, which is worth JD 302,000, is for the refinancing of housing loans that are given to the bank's employees. This deal is the first to provide refinancing for housing loans since the mortgage company was established in 1996. Referring to the two agreements, General Manager of the Arab Land Bank Mr. Samir

Mahdi says that the bank's objective is to offer its clients with mortgage loans at facilitated provisions and at a low cost. The deal also raises the bank's loans portfolio to the housing sector. In addition, it enhances competition between banks for the benefit of clients.

Presently, the Arab Land Bank has 19 branches in the country. Also the bank has 10 branches in Egypt. Moreover, it has reopened three branches in Gaza, Nablus and Bethlehem. A fourth branch is newly established in Khan Younis.

Among services covered by the bank's activities are the accepting of deposits in different currencies and the management of investment portfolios for customers. Also the bank has a network of associates that span the globe.

Also, it offers customers with retail services, hire purchase financing, credit cards (visa and national express) in addition to the Automatic letter services cash withdrawal and deposits, request cheque-books

and account balance inquiries.

This is in addition to its fast transfers service as any customer can receive his money in Jordan, and Bank Mitr delivers the transfer to any beneficiary anywhere in Egypt within 24 hours.

Other services cover the contractual savings service, the safe deposit box service and investment trustee service.

The Arab Land Bank also stresses corporate services including personal loans to individual clients and granting consumer loans.

This kind of service covers the opening of the letter of credit, issuing letters of guarantee, granting different types of credit facilities such as commercial, industrial and housing loans. It also participates with other banks under syndicated loans for certain projects.

The bank's balance sheet showed that its net credit facilities were JD 70,118 in 1996, compared with JD 63,885 in 1995. Its total assets were JD 125,196 and pretax earnings were JE 752,000 in 1996. ■

Tough new pitch deals the old soft shoe

By Lucia van der Post

IF HUSH Puppies bring to mind nothing more exciting than that sartorial role model, former UK chancellor of the exchequer Kenneth Clarke, consider this: if you had put £1,000 into Hush Puppies American stock in 1992, it would now be worth £11,000. For a brand that was dying on its feet in 1992, its revival is at least as exciting as that of Gucci and it may, to the long run, turn out to be even more so.

According to its president, Louis Dubrow, Hush Puppies should be a classic case study at every business school. You may find it hard to believe but in certain circles—notably cutting-edge clubs in Los Angeles and New York—those once-despised symbols of middle-aged suburbia are now to be seen on some of the most fashionable feet.

What most attracts people to them, it seems, is what was once their biggest handicap—their very plainness, their anonymity, their anti-fashion stance, their softness and their comfort.

But it isn't these practicalities that have made them fly off the shelves—they have become objects of desire, a sign of in-the-know recherche made by those too individual to think that fashionable feet should only be shod by Gucci or Prada.

The revival began in late 1994 when the brand was truly almost dead: barely 30,000 pairs were sold that year. In desperation, the company was thinking of entering the "aspirational" market until Jeffrey Miller, a combination journalist and marketing man with a nose for what's happening, explained that they'd got it wrong. All the cool kids in Manhattan's East Village and SoHo were scouring the antique shops for ancient versions of the Hush Puppy.

At about the same time, John Barrett, a New York designer, took the classic styles and reimagined them in bright, lively colors. Suddenly they were flying out of the shops.

So how did it happen? Is it all as chancey a thing as the whims of a few youngsters in

the East Village deciding that vintage Hush Puppies were this year's cool footwear?

Dubrow has no doubt that though whims and fashion play a part, a lot of the resurrection of the brand happened because the company at last began to do things right. "Our strategy could best be summed up," he tells me, "by saying that we decided to walk the dog on the other side of the street. In other words, we did what everybody else wasn't doing."

"When I came in, the company had done what an awful lot do: acquired many other businesses which had no synergy with the core business. It took its eye off the main brand. It became overly mature, selling to overly mature people. The products were old and tired."

"If you look back, Hush Puppies invented the casual shoe business. Before Hush Puppies, which were launched in 1958, if a man had to cut his grass he would put on his oldest pair of black wing-tips."

"In 1992, when the business was in grave trouble, everybody else was doing black and brown shoes, so we spent millions in advertising convincing people we did more than just the old colors. We made them in brilliant Day-Glo oranges, reds, greens, purples."

"The press loved them and they started to fly. To make them really desirable, we allowed them into only a few of the most fashionable outlets. We used better suede and made them more comfortable. We raised the price from \$40 to \$70. We deliberately created a shortage. Soon, demand increased. But we expanded the distribution very carefully and methodically."

"We see Hush Puppies as a classic brand—much like Levi 501 jeans or a Burberry trench coat. You keep the original, classic product and then you surround it with other items that are linked to it. We do with the shoe almost exactly what Gap does with the T-shirt—we have five core colours (black, caton brown, navy, taupe, dawn white) and then we add fashion colours throughout the season to create excitement at the selling end."

"We see ourselves as being

a bit like Starbucks. They took a mundane product—coffee—which people could buy for 25 or 50 cents anywhere else.

"They produced very fine coffee, served it in little shops which are now on every corner in every street in every town—and charged four times the price and made it chic. They created a new market. That's just what we've done with Hush Puppies."

"We've re-established the classic, core product, created a demand for it, and now the fashion products will start to flow."

And when that flow begins we may be in for a bit of a shock. The latest line is called Lounge, but trailer trash chic is what first comes to mind. Fluffy slippers in hot pink, and towelling slippers in bright blue both come with names like Phyllis or Brenda. You get the picture.

These may not be exactly what you thought you've been waiting for but I have it on the highest authority that in the smart clubs in LA and Manhattan they are just what you need to establish your club-going credentials.

So buy yours now—and if your friends think you've taken leave of your senses, you can set them straight. It's the very latest thing. And at least you'll be strutting in comfort. ■

Financial Times Syndication

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Wednesday, 25 MARCH		
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£	1.1510	1.1568
DM	0.4124	0.4145
SFr	0.4801	0.4825
FRF	0.1227	0.1233
YEN (100)	0.5624	0.5652
DEM	0.3667	0.3685
LY (100)	0.0419	0.0421

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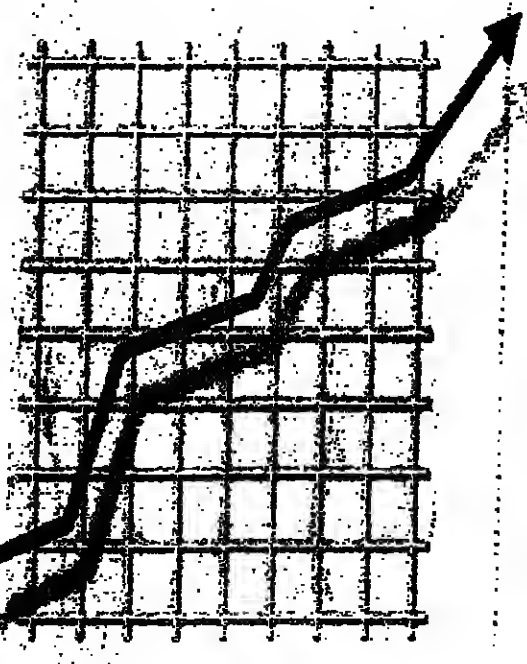
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Arab Land Bank



Israel calls US plan for West Bank 'Unacceptable'

By Rebecca Trounson

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM—Israel took a hard line Sunday against a new US effort to restart the stalled peace talks with the Palestinians, describing it as "unacceptable."

The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also declared in a statement after Sunday's Cabinet meeting that Israel "expects the United States to adhere" to earlier promises that Israel alone will determine the scope of its pullouts from the West Bank. "Reports of a 13 percent withdrawal are unacceptable," the statement said.

The strong words, along with two recent phone conversations between Netanyahu and President Clinton

and a flurry of emissaries from Jerusalem to Washington, were aimed at trying to keep the United States from going public with its ideas on how to break a yearlong deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian peace-making.

Late Sunday, the US Embassy in Tel Aviv confirmed that envoy Dennis B. Ross will return to the region at the end of the week for what political analysts predicted could be a final effort to persuade Israel and the Palestinians to make progress on peace before the United States offers its own plan.

The US initiative was first presented to Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat during separate discussions in January with Clinton. It has not been made public, apparently because of objections to its contents by both

Israel and the Palestinians, but details have been leaked—and confirmed by the parties.

The plan calls for Israel to turn over an additional 13 percent of the West Bank to the Palestinians in a three-phase troop withdrawal over a three-month period. In exchange for the new territory, the Palestinians would be required to take specific actions to stop incitement against Israel and crack down on Islamic extremist groups that have carried out attacks

against Israeli citizens. Israeli officials have said, however, that the next withdrawal, already months overdue, can amount to no more than nine percent of the West Bank. The Palestinians now have full control over 3 percent of the territory and civil authority over an additional 24 percent.

But Israel's greatest concern is the pressure that any public American presentation of the new proposals would bring to bear on its government, especially if Clinton announces the initiative himself. Then, if the Palestinians accept the plan and Israel does not, "we'll appear like the intransigent party, unwilling to accept American proposals," said David Bar-Illan, a senior aide to Netanyahu.

In Israel's battle to keep the initiative private, Netanyahu and Clinton spoke by telephone Thursday and again Saturday. Israeli officials said Netanyahu told Clinton that a 13 percent withdrawal would never be approved by his Cabinet and that Israel's security concerns alone will influence its decisions.

"What situation will Israel find itself in if it accepts dictates on its security?" Netanyahu said in an interview with Israel's Channel Two television Sunday. "How can we reach a final settlement if they dictate what our security needs are?"

In recent weeks, Israel also has sent a series of emissaries to Washington to meet with administration officials and ask for delays in any presentation of the US proposals. Industry and Trade Minister Natan Sharansky last week became the latest of those envoys, taking advantage of a meeting with Vice President Al Gore on the potential nuclear threat from Iran to convey Netanyahu's concerns on the West Bank plan.

It remained unclear Sunday whether the American initiative might be made public. Clinton arrives in Africa Monday and will not return to Washington for two weeks. Nonetheless, American officials have said the US plan will be officially presented before long. "It's all a question of timing," one said.

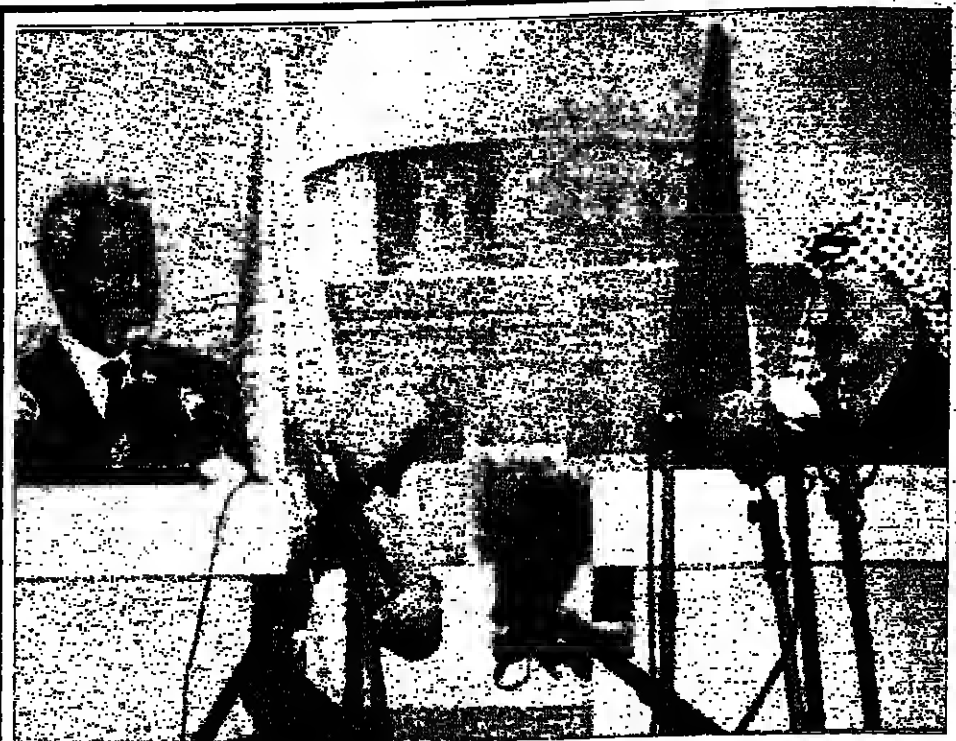
Meanwhile, Netanyahu on Sunday denied media reports that Israel, as part of its recent proposal to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon, had agreed to resume negotiations with Syria from the point where they broke off two years ago.

The talks were stopped a few months before Netanyahu came to power, at a point when they had reportedly progressed to within reach of an agreement.

Momentum is building in Israel for a pullout from Lebanon, even without a comprehensive agreement with Lebanon and its powerful neighbor Syria. Israel has proposed a conditional withdrawal, in accordance with UN Resolution 425. In exchange for security arrangements.

But UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who visited the Syrian capital, Damascus, as part of a Middle East tour that will bring him to Israel Monday, told a news conference Sunday that Syrian officials were deeply skeptical of the Israeli offer.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service



United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in Gaza, Monday. Mr. Annan's visit was part of a regional tour that included visits to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Israel. He told Mr. Arafat not to expect too much from his visit. But Mr. Arafat said there is an important role which the UN Secretary General can play in helping to activate the stalled peace process. However, Mr. Annan urged Arafat to accept the American proposals which US peace coordinator Dennis Ross is presenting when he visits the region this week.

TV documentary tests Israeli tolerance

By Judy Dempsey

AT FIRST, they could do no wrong. The early episodes of Tekuma (revival), a 22-part documentary series by Israel's Channel One television, captured the pioneering zeal of Zionists. Young and old were shown ploughing the land, united in building the Jewish state. Other footage had crowds at Haifa welcoming thousands of Jews seeking a new life in the newly established state.

But Tekuma was never going to depict 50 years of history through the misty lens of nostalgic nostalgia. It inevitably began to show that Israel's past was not all heroic, though the present government of Benjamin Netanyahu would like to think otherwise.

The forces of intolerance and intolerance, secular versus ultra-Orthodox, vie with one another to define a Jewish democratic state, just as much

as the forces of patriotism and blind nationalism fight to claim history. In raising these issues, Tekuma decided not to perpetuate a myth that Israel's past consists only of victims and heroes.

One recent episode, for example, showed how Israel treated its Arab population after the 1948 war of independence. For more than 15 years, Israel imposed military rule on the Arabs, believing they were a fifth column bent on destroying the fledgling state.

Last Sunday's episode described how the Ashkenazi Jews from eastern Europe, most of whom belonged to the then ruling Mapai or Labour party, treated the hundreds of thousands of Sephardic Jews from North Africa, Iran and Iraq who settled in Israel during the 1950s.

Sephardim were shown living in squalid conditions, denied any political influence under Labour until the late Menachem Begin championed their cause, catapulting the rightwing Likud party into power. That episode was uncomfortable viewing for Labour, whose present leader, Ehud Barak, tried to make amends for past wrongs with a recent apology to the Sephardim.

But the episode which is proving a real test of Israel's tolerance has yet to be screened. Biladi Biladi, Arabic for state, is due to be shown next month. It explains how Palestinians perceive their struggle with Israel, with much of the footage coming from the archives of the Palestine Liberation Organisation when Israeli troops invaded Beirut in 1982. It will be the first time a wide Israeli audience hears the views of the other side, provided they are allowed to.

If Limor Livnat, communications minister, has her way, Biladi Biladi, and the rest of series, will not be aired. In a letter to Rina Shipira, chairman of the Israel Broadcasting Authority, Livnat said Tekuma "discredits the Jew-

ish state...it robs it of self-confidence and pride." She accused the IBA of "methodically distorting the great Zionist actions."

For Livnat and the nationalist wing of Likud, the more ignominious side of Israel's past is not the issue. What is important is myth and image. "Tekuma damages our self-esteem, our children's and the world's image of us," she wrote. "The IBA is not supposed to present the Palestinian propaganda viewpoint while pushing aside our myths through self-criticism." She demanded the series be halted until an "objective" inquiry is conducted.

Such rightwing criticism of Channel One is nothing new and reflects the belief that the media is controlled by left-wing elites. "Israeli society is hardly able to agree on the future and can hardly agree on its past, not to speak of the present," Tekuma is at least an attempt to address our past from different perspectives," said an IBA official.

As Israel approaches its 50th anniversary, it remains more divided than ever about its past, with the political camps split between those who believe it is time to give the Palestinians a stake in their history and those who believe Israel's history is exclusively Jewish and heroic.

Moshe Lissak, sociology professor at the Hebrew University and a Tekuma adviser, argues that the right "believes that anything that deviates from the Israeli view of history that we have to be so confident and right in our cause is tantamount to treason, to betrayal."

Even if Tekuma continues unscathed, the political drama will be far from over. The IBA gets a new director-general next month. When the prime minister announced the appointment he promised that public broadcasting would have "an essential role in inculcating basic national values."

Financial Times Syndication



Baghdad arrests anthrax expert attempting to flee Iraq

By Craig Turner

UNITED NATIONS—The Iraqi government has arrested a key figure in the development of its biological weapons, depriving UN investigators of a potentially valuable source of information on Baghdad's germ warfare program, officials said Tuesday.

Nasser Hindawi, described by UN and American officials as a former high-level official of the biological weapons establishment specializing in anthrax, was seized on suspicion that he was planning to flee the country, said Nizar Hamdoun, Iraq's ambassador to the United Nations.

Hindawi has been interviewed many times by UN

disarmament experts trying to track down information about biological weapons, which is the portion of Iraq's illegal arsenal about which inspectors know the least.

One official familiar with the inspection program said Hindawi has been one of the most cooperative Iraqi officials but that he has not been interviewed in more than a year. Nonetheless, he had been a key figure in the program, and his arrest would have been questioned again.

"He's been reasonably forthcoming in the past, as have quite a few of them (Iraqi arms experts)," the UN official said. "Yes, we probably would have gotten more out of him if he wasn't in their clutches, but that's true with

all of them."

David Kay, a former weapons inspector now in private business in the Washington, D.C., area, said Hindawi had broad knowledge of the germ warfare program and "certainly would have been a good source of important information" if he had escaped Iraq and cooperated with the United Nations.

Hamdoun said Hindawi was seized for "attempting to leave the country illegally in possession of improper papers" and was being held at an undisclosed location. Hamdoun said the papers had been turned over to the weapons inspectors and that Hindawi would continue to be available for questioning, although only in the presence of an

Iraq government representative.

Even Buchanan, a spokesman for the weapons inspection team, said most of the papers turned over were copies of documents already in the United Nations' possession. Buchanan added that it hasn't been decided whether to try to question Hindawi again but noted that "the environment in Baghdad is not conducive to open interviewing."

Kay said UN officials could demand to interrogate Hindawi at the UN field headquarters in Baghdad and even seek to talk to him without other Iraqis present, but that would be signing his death warrant.

In Washington, Defense Secretary William Cohen quipped that he was not sure whether the

United States had tried to assist Hindawi in any attempt to leave Iraq. But he said Hindawi's arrest might be further evidence "that there is an attempt on the part of Saddam Hussein to continue to hide and prevent inspectors from receiving information that would help them in their business."

Meanwhile, 18 diplomats designated as escorts for inspectors entering Iraqi presidential sites arrived in Baghdad, joining two others already based in the Iraqi capital, according to UN spokesman Juan Carlos Brandt.

The first inspections of the

presidential compounds could begin this week, officials here said. The new inspection procedures were negotiated last month by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in a meeting with Hussein.

The weapons inspection team must certify that Iraq has dismantled its proscribed weapons programs before the UN Security Council can consider removing economic sanctions that are crippling the country.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Russian agents reportedly recruited missile scientists to work in Iran

By Daniel Williams

MOSCOW—Russian intelligence agents for the past several years have quietly recruited scientists here to go to Iran and teach Iranian counterparts how to build missiles to carry deadly payloads as far as 1,200 miles, Russian and diplomatic sources said.

Russians and foreigners said officials of the Federal Security Service, Russia's intelligence arm, recruited the scientists at Russian technological institutes and weapons factories for work in Iran. The contracts, however, were negotiated in Iran between the scientists and their hosts—apparently to insulate the security service and the government in Moscow from responsibility.

The Iranians paid the institute or factory separately, Rus-

sian and foreign officials said. The Federal Security Service is the successor to the KGB secret police and still oversees Russia's sensitive arms factories and high-technology institutes. The agency, in cooperation with the Foreign Ministry, arranged for the scientists to leave Russia. Russian officials said. As in Soviet times, the government restricts the travel of technicians who possess knowledge of sophisticated technology.

Russia intends to stop recruitment and curb permission for the scientists to travel to Iran, the Russian officials said. The curtailment follows a January decree issued by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, who has long denied that it was government policy to transfer missile technology to Iran.

He and other Russian lead-

ers insisted that any leakage was purely on a freelance basis—the government did not break the 1987 Missile Technology Control Regime, an international accord that Russia signed and that is supposed to discourage missile proliferation.

The repeated denials have left diplomats and some Russian observers wondering whether the government is willing or able to stop the flow of scientists to Tehran.

"If it wasn't government policy before, then how can they guarantee they can stop it now? If it was government policy, then they were lying before and who should believe them now?" said one Russian official.

If the new policy takes hold, one reason would be Russia's view that the economic gains from technology sales would

be outweighed by the possible loss of financial support from the United States and Europe. A Russian official said. Another is the realization that Iran aims to build a missile program that eventually will make it independent of Moscow's help.

"The Russians are having to work from the basis that Iran is learning and has the money to build its own missiles. Is Russia really gaining an arms market, or is it just selling the store?" asked a Western diplomat.

The Russians also are reacting to intense American pressure to stop helping Iran build missiles that could hit as far away as Israel and Western Europe and could be mounted with nuclear warheads.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

English language Training at The Radisson SAS Hotel Amman

Last week, another group of staff members at the Radisson SAS Hotel Amman successfully completed an English language course. It is part of the PST program (Professional Skills Training) implemented at the hotel to provide the best service in Amman for its guests.

Christian Gartmann, General Manager and Michael Odeh, English teacher together with the graduates.



4/2/1998



ARAB BANK PLC

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Dear Shareholders,

The world and regional economies went through difficult times in 1997. Consequently, your institution, the Arab Bank, had to accommodate itself to the new economic changes. In spite of the unfavourable economic conditions, the Bank's results nevertheless improved. I am pleased to summarise for you in this report the commendable achievements of Arab Bank in 1997.

Significant changes in the business environment presented major challenges to the banking industry. Without a timely adaptation to the new environment, it would have been difficult to continue the Bank's operations successfully. It is important to note, however, that the full impact of some of the changes is yet to be seen.

Most noteworthy is the successful conclusion of the World Trade Organisation negotiations to expand the Uruguay Round agreement to include financial services, which was achieved in December 1997. With the expansion of the World Trade Organisation agreement, a major hurdle to the globalisation of financial markets has been overcome. Accordingly, financial institutions can more easily reach all markets without an actual physical presence. The effect of the new agreement will be to intensify competition at all levels: locally, regionally and internationally.

Furthermore, the specialised Committee for Banking Supervision of the Bank for International Settlements has reached the final stage in its work to strengthen supervision of the banking industry worldwide. Its new recommendations aim to safeguard the integrity of the international financial system and prevent any crisis that may have a multinational impact as a result of mismanagement or fraud. The Group of Ten members are working to ensure that the new rules will be effectively implemented within the developing countries along with the OECD members.

In addition, the amendment to the capital accord to incorporate market risks became effective at the end of 1997. To enhance internal control and management of risks, the supervisory authorities also requested the banking industry to improve its ability to control total risks within its own organisation.

To adapt to the new working conditions, and as a result of increased competition as well as the decline in profitability, mergers and acquisitions intensified in 1997. The banking industry is expected to accelerate efforts to merge in the future, thus creating mega-financial institutions that will dominate the financial markets.

The banking industry was also significantly affected last year by the financial crisis in the Asia Pacific region. Investments by multinational financial institutions in these markets were subject to a wide range of risks. Arab Bank succeeded in meeting this crisis efficiently as a result of the high quality of its assets and of its sound policies and systems.

The results achieved by the Bank in 1997 testify to its strong financial position and its reputed ability to enhance its shareholders' equity and to satisfy

client needs and wants. As a result, the annual growth of net income exceeded 12.5%. Net income after tax reached JOD 107.7 million compared to JOD 95.7 million in 1996. The enhanced profit resulted from the positive development in total revenues, which amounted to 7.2%. Total revenues for the year reached JOD 310.8 million compared to JOD 289.8 million in the previous year. At the same time, the Bank was able to confine the increase in its operating expenses to acceptable levels. Total operating expenses were JOD 165.2 million in 1997 compared to JOD 153.7 million in 1996.

Consequent to the improved net income of 1997, shareholders' equity rose to JOD 720.0 million, representing an improvement of 14.3% over total shareholders' equity in the previous year, which had stood at JOD 630.0 million. The Bank will continue its policy of increasing shareholders' equity so as to enhance its earning power. The solid equity base will also enable the Bank to meet the capital adequacy requirements for credit and market risks.

Arab Bank management takes all necessary measures to manage its assets and liabilities as efficiently as possible. The management also makes every effort to increase the stable funds in the form of customer deposits. In 1997, the Bank succeeded in augmenting customer deposits to JOD 7,248.8 million compared to JOD 6,809.0 million in 1996. Simultaneously, the Bank was able to improve its loan portfolio to reach JOD 4,672.4 million compared to JOD 4,163.3 million at the end of 1996. In spite of the Bank's continuous efforts to increase its good quality risk assets, it follows a strategic policy that requires maintaining high liquidity ratios to meet all contingencies and risks. The liquidity ratio at the end of 1997 was 51.4% compared to 55.7% the previous year.

At the Arab Bank Group level, net income rose to USD 220.8 million compared to USD 197.8 million in 1996. Shareholders' equity improved to USD 1,570.9 million compared to USD 1,402.5 million the previous year. It is important to mention that the strength of the US Dollar had affected the total equity as a result of foreign exchange translation. The reporting currency of the Group is the US Dollar, in which most of its assets and liabilities are held. The liquidity ratio for the Group reached 48.0% compared to 51.1% the year before.

In the past year, the Bank worked very hard to excel in serving its clients and meeting their needs in a satisfactory and timely manner. The establishment of the Islamic International Arab Bank Plc was a major step taken by the Bank to meet the needs of corporate and individual depositors in the Arab and Islamic countries. The new Bank has a capital of JOD 40, million, and it provides products and services in accordance with Islamic rules. It started operations early in 1998 through four branches in Jordan. In the future the Islamic International Arab Bank Plc is planning to offer its services in other Arab and Islamic countries in accordance with the general strategic plans of the Group. In the area of personal and private banking, the Bank reorganised all its activities. Qualified staff had been trained to enhance the Bank's investment products and funds, as well as asset management services to



meet client requirements.

Arab Bank also invested resources to enhance the efficiency of its centralised asset and liability management. Central management of assets and liabilities requires increased efficiency in communications to enable the banks to obtain real-time and on-line data from their financial centres. Arab Bank also worked to develop and acquire new information systems, value-at-risk measurement and simulation to enable it to manage risks more efficiently and to enhance medium and long-term plans. The management plans to add significantly to its ability in dealing with exogenous variables. The corporate treasury, which is under development in London, is expected to improve the asset/liability management process and enhance the efficiency of cash management. It will also develop new risk management products that will assist clients in dealing with fluctuations in interest rates and foreign exchange.

At the beginning of January 1998, our City branch in London celebrated its 25th anniversary. The Park Lane branch was established later in 1976 and the Kensington branch in 1980. The three UK branches spearheaded the multinational expansion of the Bank outside the Arab region, which had started with the incorporation of its sister institution Arab Bank (Switzerland) in 1962. From that time onwards, the Bank succeeded in building a significant branch and subsidiary network covering almost all major financial centres, extending from China in the Far East to Chile in South America.

In 1997, at the regional level, Arab Bank succeeded in reclaiming the full ownership of Arab Bank Maroc after repurchasing the interest of Banque Centrale Populaire, our former Moroccan partner, which had shared the ownership with us for more than twenty years.

In accordance with paragraph (B) of Article 132 of the Jordan Company Law of 1997, with the meeting of the general assembly and the release of the members of the Board of Directors from their liabilities of the year 1997, the term of office of the current Board comes to an end. Article 171 of the same Law calls for the general assembly to elect a new Board. On this occasion, in your name, I would like to thank all Board members for the special efforts they made to serve your institution throughout their years of membership.

Finally, I would like to convey my appreciation and gratitude to all shareholders and clients for their faithful and unswerving support. I also thank all staff members for their hard work and loyalty.

Abdulmajed Shoman
Chairman, Board of Directors

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Arab Bank must constantly adapt to change and meet challenges in order to best fulfil the needs of its customers. The Bank's survival and steady performance over time is evidence of its ability to position itself strategically without losing the focus of its original vision.

Arab Bank's financial objectives are best met by concentrating on targeted markets, recognising their requirements and satisfying them effectively. The need for three new product lines in the areas of Islamic banking, funds and investment products and hedging and risk management, has been underscored by the Bank's clients. Arab Bank's response has been timely and effective.

The Islamic International Arab Bank Plc has just started operations. Furthermore, a new and wide range of funds and investment opportunities are being made available to Arab Bank customers. In the area of hedging and risk management, the corporate treasury is in the process of developing customer-oriented derivative products. Arab Bank is also engaged in re-engineering its traditional services to increase their efficiency and make them more competitive. Arab Bank's product quality and its ability to meet customer needs in a reliable and safe environment have always been maintained to reassure our household and corporate customers.

Financial strength along with solid earning power which outperformed competitors are evident in the results of 1997. The Bank has continued improving its profitability while maintaining its asset quality and strong financial position. Arab Bank Group's net income after tax to average equity ratio was 14.8%. Return on average assets was augmented to 1.35% from 1.31%. On the other hand, the liquidity ratio is at 48.0% compared to 51.1%. Capital adequacy for credit risk is 16.28%. Arab Bank Group does not have a Tier III component to participate in covering market risks. Nevertheless, Tier I and Tier II equity are sufficient to endow future operations with significant additional earning power.

Outperforming peers underlines both the proper fit and strategic positioning of Arab Bank. The Bank continues to address the essential needs of its clients within its traditional and safe environment and without imposing unnecessary and burdensome processing or requirements. The founders' mission continues to direct the efforts of the institution by meeting the needs of clients with innovative and effective financial services and products. Efficiency is achieved by the superior productivity of Arab Bank's loyal and motivated employees.

The unique position of Arab Bank is strengthened by a significant and meaningful global presence. It is considered the only bank in the region that has successfully achieved a fitting and useful geographical diversification. Operating in the major international centres, the Bank is able to succeed in managing its risks. Most importantly, the Bank offers clients the opportunity to profit from multinational markets. Effective treasury and



asset/liability management is also further enhanced by the Bank's ability to function globally and around-the-clock. The Arab Bank network of branches and affiliates with diversified financial products combine to form a multinational financial institution with a very strong regional focus.

To the management of Arab Bank, meeting challenges has always meant an opportunity for improvement. Capitalisation of the positive side of change strengthens the dynamic characteristics of the organisation. In 1997 Arab Bank's efforts to achieve state-of-the-art total risk management were intensified. In-depth analyses and evaluations in conjunction with external consultants have produced a realistic and factual risk profile. Complete and effective plans for risk management have been developed, covering credit, operations and market risks among other aspects. In other areas, specialised committees have been working to prepare the Bank for a successful implementation of the expected transformations in operations and markets consequent to the approach of EMU as well as the year 2000 and, most importantly, the successful conclusion of the negotiations of the World Trade Organisation on financial services.

Looking to the future, Arab Bank will continue to assess its successful multinational presence as a vital participant in international markets. The energising base will always be its strategic regional position. The Bank will work to coordinate four basic strategic elements. First and foremost is the satisfaction of customers and the realisation of their needs. Products and the continuous development of human resources will always be the tools to achieve pre-set targets. Innovation and improvement in management information systems is another important element that will participate in measuring performance and in assigning responsibilities at an extremely detailed level.

Financially, Arab Bank will work to be among the highest capitalised institutions in the region by continuously retaining its growing income. Anticipated average growth rate of net income after tax is expected to exceed the growth rate of the past three years. The development in asset size will be correlated with the growth in equity, leaving always a comfortable margin for the enhancement of earning power. The structure of assets may be changed slightly towards higher productivity. Again, the liquidity ratios will remain substantially better than the accepted norms in the region and in international markets.

Khalid Shoman
Deputy Chairman,
Board of Directors



ARAB BANK

PLC

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' 68th ANNUAL REPORT

For the year ended 31 December 1997, submitted to the General Assembly of Shareholders at the Annual Meeting held at the Bank's Head Office Building, Shmeisani, Amman, at 10 a.m. on Friday, 27 March 1998.

We are pleased to present to you the 68th Annual Report of Arab Bank Group which highlights the most important developments as well as our proposal for distributing the net income.

The financial statements show clearly that the Bank had a good year. The extraordinary achievements reflect the management's sound policies and its success in accommodating different sets of influential variables.

Business environment

Generally, the world economy and financial conditions maintained strong growth although a number of countries experienced setbacks as a consequence of the financial crisis in Southeast Asian markets. The global economy posted one of the largest expansions of the last ten years. World inflation receded to the lowest level in decades. The rise of the USD continued unabated against all major currencies, but the GBP, World real GDP grew 3.0%, the same rate as in the previous year. Real GDP of the major industrialised countries increased by 2.5%, slightly exceeding the previous year's level. Although the Asian market turmoil caused repercussions around the world, revealing the fragility of global interdependence and the susceptibility of integrated national economies, overall confidence and economic activity remained relatively undisturbed.

The United States economy, fuelled by strong consumer and business confidence, is characterised by robust growth, low inflation, a diminishing fiscal imbalance and the lowest unemployment levels in nearly 30 years. The budget deficit fell to its lowest level of the past three decades. Real GDP rose by 3.8%, in addition to having successfully weathered the October stock market correction, the United States share price indices continued to surge and reached new highs, surpassing the already high 1996 levels.

Southeast Asian countries reeled under the currency and financial crisis, which had extensive economic and political consequences, including being widely held as the catalyst for the international stock market correction. These ramifications made it necessary for the IMF to extend rescue packages to Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea.

In reflection of Japan's economy, as one of the slowest growing industrialised countries in 1997, real GDP increased by only 1.4%. Consumer confidence was at an all-time low. Moreover, interest rates sank to new lows, share prices on the Nikkei index fell to their lowest level in over two years. Industrial output decreased and housing starts remained in a slump. Accordingly, Japan failed to play its usual leading economic role in the area.

As 1997 was the reference year to ascertain which EU countries fulfil the Maastricht Treaty criteria to become members of the European Monetary Union (EMU), strict budgets were imposed. As a result of these tight fiscal constraints, real GDP in the EU as a whole grew by 2.4%. It continues to remain unclear whether all EU countries will meet the convergence criteria. However, the expectation is that, apart from Greece and countries choosing to opt out, all others will qualify for the third stage of EMU's currency union in 1999.

Stable oil prices had a positive impact on the economy of the countries of the Middle East. Most of the Arab countries continued their progress and economic growth. However, due to uncertainties at the political level, the region did not enjoy the extraordinary development anticipated. In addition to political stability, a substantial improvement in laws and regulations is needed to encourage a meaningful foreign investment flow to the area.

Financial results

Arab Bank PLC net income rose by JOD 12.0 million to reach JOD 107.7 million from JOD 95.7 million, representing an increase of 12.5%. Moreover, the Group's net income increased by USD 23.0 million and 11.6% to reach USD 220.8 million from USD 197.8 million the previous year.

The profitability growth rate underlines the extraordinary performance of Arab Bank. The ability to maintain above-normal profitability year after year highlights the real earning power of the Bank. The average growth of the Bank's net income during the past five-year period was 14.4%. Sustaining the earning power of the Bank requires continuous improvement in equity on the one hand and the ability to invest its financial resources in high quality assets on the other hand. In addition, an excellent performance requires ever greater efficiency together with the ability to control operating expenses. The Bank also works to diversify its risks in order to advance continuously within pre-planned objectives and without any major discrepancies.

Geographical diversification is achieved by spreading the operations of the Bank outside the Arab region to the major financial centres of the world. In 1997, the branches in Jordan contributed 18.3% to income, other Arab countries added 38.8%, Europe 18.1%, the Far East 3.2% and the United States 1.6%. Net interest and commission provided 84.8% of total revenues. The remaining 15.2% was generated from foreign exchange and other income. In 1996, net interest and commission contributed 86.4%, foreign exchange and other income 13.6%. The increase in operating expenses was limited to budget.

Shareholders' equity and appropriation of income

The Board of Directors proposes to the General Assembly the following allocation of net income:

	JOD ('000)
Net income:	107,655
To voluntary reserve	28,000
To general reserve	62,000
Cash dividends	17,600
Directors' remunerations	55
Total appropriation	107,655

In accordance with the above, the dividend per share will be JOD 4.0, representing 40% of nominal share value. The Bank will deduct 10% of dividends to meet the withholding tax requirement, which will be paid directly to the tax authorities in Jordan. Thus, net cash dividends payable to the shareholders will be JOD 3.6 per share.

After the approval of the proposed appropriation, shareholders' equity will reach JOD 720.0 million compared to JOD 630.0 million at the end of 1996. The increase in shareholders' equity will be JOD 90.0 million or 14.3%. Arab Bank standard source of equity is the capitalisation of income.

The top management of the Bank steers the equity in accordance with the change in the structure of assets aimed at earning the highest possible return within the chosen specific risk class. Shareholders' equity is also an essential element in meeting the capital adequacy requirement for credit and market risks specified by the supervisory authorities. In view of the above, it can be concluded that the unfailing ability of the Bank to generate income and enhance its future performance depends on its ability to capitalise as much profit as possible. The enhanced capital base satisfies the requirements resulting from the Bank's growing risk-assets and expanded operations.

Other achievements

The management has targeted three basic objectives. Development and improvement of the Bank's services and products to meet client needs and wants was the main objective. In 1997, Arab Bank was able to provide a new line of investments, products and funds, which were well received by clients. Early in 1998, the Bank added a new line of Islamic products with the opening of the Islamic International Arab Bank PLC. In addition, the management worked to supplement and re-engineer its traditional financial products and services in such a way as to offer clients a more competitive line of services.

The management also aimed at increasing the efficiency of the staff and the effectiveness of the organisation. Several specialised seminars and training programmes were held in the area of asset/liability management and other specialised and managerial leadership courses. The Bank also intensified its utilisation of modern technology for information systems, communications and automated services.

The third objective concentrated on total control of risks. Internal control systems have been improved and specialised committees have been activated, in accordance with the recommendations of in-house and external expert studies. Better controls guarantee the continuation of operations without any unwarranted hindrance.

After four years of service on the Board, our term of office comes to an end. On this occasion, we would like to express our appreciation to the shareholders for their continuous support, the clients for giving us their business and for their trust in the Bank and the subsidiary and affiliate companies. We would also like to thank all the staff for their loyalty and hard work which resulted in the good performance of the Bank during the past four years.

The Board of directors.

Financial Review

This section contains the analysis of the Group's results of operations as well as its financial position. The financial statements, which are also included in this report, are presented in US Dollars after the translation of all the Group members' financial statements into US Dollars, which is the functional and reporting currency of the Group. Arab Bank PLC and Arab Bank (Switzerland) constitute around 90% of the total assets of the Group. The reporting currencies of the two entities are the Jordanian Dinar and the Swiss Franc, respectively. The average exchange rate of the Jordanian Dinar has been pegged to the US Dollar at 0.709 since 1995. The Swiss Franc exchange rate was 1.4540 at the end of 1997 and 1.3490 at the end of 1996.

Results of operations

Overview: In 1997, the Group continued its good financial performance. The net income of Arab Bank Group crossed the USD 200 million mark for the first time in its history. Net income after tax reached USD 220.8 million. Total revenue was augmented to USD 577.5 million from USD 541.4 million. Net income per share (on the basis of Arab Bank PLC common shares of 4,400,000) was 11.6% better than in the previous year, recording USD 50.2 per share compared to USD 45.0 per share in 1996. Increase of operating expenses was confined to 5.3% to reach USD 282.3 million from USD 268.0 million.

Interest and commission income

The Group realised an increase of USD 14.0 million in net interest and commission income, representing 2.7% over 1996. The low level of interest rates along with the Central Bank of Jordan's requirement of 14% interest free statutory reserve on deposits in foreign currencies depressed the interest numbers. The following table contains comparative figures for the two years:

	1997	1996	Variance	
	In USD millions	In USD millions	In USD millions	%
Interest and commission income	1,355.9	1,364.7	(8.8)	(0.6)
Interest and commission expense	815.9	838.7	(22.8)	(2.7)
Net interest and commission	540.0	526.0	14.0	2.7

The percentage of interest income to total assets was 7.4% in 1997 compared to 7.9% in 1996. The net interest and commission income to total asset ratio was 3.2%, slightly lower than in the previous year. On the other hand, the growth in loan portfolio and other risk assets contributed positively to the interest income.

Revenue from foreign exchange trading

The US Dollar appreciated aggressively against other major currencies during most of the year. The revenue

from foreign exchange trading slightly improved to USD 25.6 million from USD 25.5 million in 1996. The foreign exchange trading positions opened as part of the Group's activities are liquidated on a daily basis. Exceptions in extraordinary circumstances are limited to small amounts and they are well controlled by higher levels of management.

Other revenues

Other revenues improved to USD 57.7 million from USD 41.5 million in 1996. The gain of USD 16.2 million or 39.1% over the previous year was the result of income derived from the trading portfolio and recovered bad debts. Other revenues also included revenues from leased premises, services to clients and several other items of a non-recurring nature.

Revenue-related expenses

Revenue-related expenses are composed mainly of specific and general provisions for doubtful debts and investments. In 1997, total provisions debited to the profit and loss account were USD 45.9 million compared to USD 51.6 million in the previous year.

Operating expenses

Total operating expenses increased to USD 282.3 million from USD 268.0 million. In spite of the increase of USD 14.3 million or 5.3% in operating expenses, it only represented 48.9% of total revenue compared to 49.5% the previous year. The following table contains a detailed comparative analysis of operating expenses:

	1997	1996	Variance	
	In USD millions	In USD millions	In USD millions	%
Staff	155.2	145.1	10.1	7.0
Information system	19.9	18.6	1.3	7.0
Depreciation	19.8	17.8	2.0	11.2
Other operating expenses	87.4	86.5	0.9	1.0
Total	282.3	268.0	14.3	5.3

It can be observed from the above that the increase in operating expenses was highly correlated with growth of revenues.

Net income and income tax

Income before tax and net income after tax are presented below:

	1997	1996	Variance	
	In USD millions	In USD millions	In USD millions	%
Net income before tax	295.2	273.3	21.9	8.0
Income tax	74.4	75.5	(1.1)	(1.5)
Net income after tax	220.8	197.8	23.0	11.6

Net income after tax in 1997 improved by USD 23.0 million to reach USD 220.8 million representing an increase of 11.6%. Income tax remained at the same level as in 1996. Income tax does not include some taxes paid to affiliated companies. It mainly represents income tax relating to Arab Bank PLC, its sister institution and subsidiaries. Profitability ratios improved slightly in 1997. Net income represented 38.2% of total revenue in comparison to 36.5% in 1996. Net income to shareholders' equity remained at 14.1%, the same level as the previous year. Net income to total assets improved to 1.31% in 1997 compared to 1.24% in 1996.

Financial position

Arab Bank Group balance sheet structure is unique. Its regional and multinational operations call for certain requirements which may not be applicable to other institutions. The management of the Group always aims to maintain simultaneously high liquidity, prime quality assets and solid equity.

Liquidity management

The liquidity management policy of Arab Bank Group is an important element of its strategic orientation. Liquidity is defined as the ability to meet near-term and projected long-term funding commitments, while supporting future expansion in a manner consistent with the Bank's strategic plans. Arab Bank Group maintains higher liquidity than the acceptable norm of the banking industry. The high liquidity enables the Group to survive in the extraordinarily unstable political environment of the Middle East. For liquidity management purposes, the Group is divided into several regional centres. Each centre is responsible for the operating units in its area and has its own funding and liquidity plans in accordance with the policies of the Group management. Liquidity is managed and monitored on a daily basis by the Treasurer and the Manager. ALCO in the centres co-ordinate liquidity positions on a weekly basis. At Head Office, the High ALCO monitors and supervises the liquidity position of the Bank on a monthly basis. Strategies and adjustments of policies are carried out quarterly.

Prudent liquidity analysis at all levels includes dividing the assets and liabilities into different maturity bands. It also includes analysis of the sources of funds, their stability and cost. The following table gives a comparative analysis of the liquid assets of the Group:

	1997	1996	Variance	
	In USD millions	In USD millions	In USD millions	%
Cash and banks	5,639.8	6,023.1	(383.3)	(6.4)
Government securities	1,049.9	912.9	137.0	15.0
Trading securities	182.0	166.0	16.0	9.7
Marketable investments	1,192.2	1,016.9	175.3	17.2
Total	8,063.9	8,118.9	(55.0)	(0.7)

It can be observed from the above table that the liquid assets declined by 0.7%. Yet again, most of the decline was due to a reduction in the placement with banks. It should also be noted that liquid assets on average mature within three months.

The external sources of funds at the end of 1997 and 1996 are presented below:

	1997	1996	Variance	
	In USD millions	In USD millions	In USD millions	%
Customer deposits	10,404.9	9,680.7	724.2	7.5
Bank deposits	3,218.2	3,327.5	(109.3)	(3.3)
Cash margin	712.3	598.1	114.2	19.1
Total	14,335.4	13,606.3	729.1	5.4

Customer deposits are composed of stable funds that have remained with the Bank for continuous and steady periods. Core deposits are estimated at 80%.

The following table gives some liquidity ratio measures for the Group at the end of 1997 and 1996:

	1997	1996	
	%	%	
Cash and quasi-cash to total external funds	56.3	59.7	
Cash and quasi-cash to total assets	48.0	51.1	
Customer deposits and cash margin to loan portfolio	146.7	150.5	
Customer deposits and cash margin to total assets	66.1	64.6	

The improvement in customer deposits to total asset ratio coupled with the decline in other liquidity ratios indicate that the Bank has improved the effectiveness of its asset/liability management.

Credit management

The Arab Bank Group conservative credit policy is a key element in its success. Time and again, its balanced and well planned credit-granting philosophy and system have distinguished Arab Bank from others.

To manage balance sheet and off-balance sheet exposure, the Group risk control process is applied globally. Responsibilities for credit risks are shared between line units and Head Office. The branches and subsidiaries have a primary responsibility to evaluate credit risks and ensure that each individual credit exposure is soundly controlled and managed. The line manager has the authority to grant credit up to a certain pre-determined amount. At Head Office, the decisions related to credit are handled by committees at three different levels:

- Credit department committee
 - Credit management committee
 - Senior authority committee.
- Risk assets are divided into three different groups: Jordan, Arab countries and international. Each area is controlled by a specialised credit department. The Deputy President for credit coordinates and supervises the three credit departments and heads the credit management committee. The senior authority committee is chaired by the General Manager and includes the President, the Deputy President and the three heads of the credit departments.

Development of loan portfolio

Loans and advances net of provisions grew by USD 748.9 million, representing an increase of 11.0% to reach USD 7,578.5 million at the end of 1997. The off-balance sheet exposure increased by USD 811.2 million or 16.6%, thus expanding the total credit risk of the Group by 13.3% over 1996 figures. The following table contains the comparative data of the Group credit risk in 1997 and 1996.

	1997	1996	Variance	
	In USD millions	In USD millions	In USD millions	%
Loan portfolio, net	7,578.5	6,829.6	748.9	11.0
Off-balance sheet:				
- Acceptances	378.3	241.1	137.2	56.9
- Letters of credit	1,167.1	1,308.5	(141.4)	(10.8)
- Letters of guarantee	2,885.3	2,323.7	561.6	24.2
- Undrawn loans	1,263.7	1,009.9	253.8	25.1
Total off-balance sheet	5,694.4	4,883.2	811.2	16.6
Total exposure	13,272.9	11,712.8	1,560.1	13.3

Loans and advances composed 45.1% of total assets in 1997 compared to 42.9% at the end of the previous year. They also represented 4.8 times the shareholders' equity compared to 4.9 times at the end of 1996.

Provision for doubtful debts

The provisions for doubtful debts are determined by the evaluation of individual credits and changes in the quality of credit portfolio, levels of non-accrual loans, economic conditions, changes in size and character of credit risks and other related factors. Risk assets are classified according to their quality into six groups: current, watchlist, special mention, substandard, doubtful and loss. Credits with serious degrees of classification are reviewed by Head Office on a quarterly basis. The credit portfolio is reviewed semi-annually in order to assess sufficient provisions. Levels and amounts of provisions are also examined in the light of the monetary authorities' guidelines as well as studies performed by the external auditors. The Group ceases to accrue interest on doubtful debts as soon as they are classified as such. Arab Bank Group's provisioning policies are more strict than the industry norms and monetary authorities' guidelines. Balances of credit risk provisions are presented in the following table:

	1997	1996	Variance	
	In USD millions	In USD millions	In USD millions	%
Provisions	413.8	367.6	46.2	12.6
Interest in suspense	81.3	71.3	10.0	14.0
Total	495.1	438.9	56.2	12.8

Parallel to the increase in the volume of provisions, the Group also succeeded in 1997 in maintaining its normally high risk-asset quality.

Interest rate risk management

The Group aims to minimise the negative impact on net income of the adverse movements on interest rates. The Group manages its interest rate risks in accordance with the policies and limits established by the Head Office of the Bank. ALCO in the centres as well as Treasurers handle the day-to-day management of interest rate risks. The ALCO at Head Office deals with strategic positions and policies.

Arab Bank Group also takes a conservative approach in its interest rate risk management. In general, the Bank matches the maturity of its assets and liabilities. The Group trading and dealing in interest rate derivatives is mostly limited to capping its mismatch position.

The impact of interest rate risk management as well as

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS' 68th ANNUAL REPORT

Other dimensions of risk supervision are reflected in the net interest and commission in the Group's financial results. Net interest and commission to average total assets of the Group for 1997 and 1996 are presented below:

	1997	1996	Variance
	In USD millions %		
Net interest and commission	540.0	526.0	14.0 2.7
Average total assets	16,355.9	15,154.0	1,201.9 7.9
Net interest and commission to average assets	3.3%	3.5%	

From the above, it can be observed that net interest and commission to average assets declined to 3.3% in 1997 from 3.5%. On the other hand, net income to average assets was improved to 1.4% from 1.3%.

Capital management
Shareholders' equity along with other components of capital form the main source of the earning power in commercial banks. The capital base specifies the size, structure and risk components of the balance sheet. Regulatory authorities, in conformity with the BIS rules, have harmonised the capital adequacy requirements worldwide.

The General Manager and the High ALCO carry out capital management at Head Office. The Group's capital management policies aim to provide the shareholders with a good return on equity without exposing the institution to unwarranted risks. The solid capital base coupled with high liquidity underlines the extraordinary financial strength of Arab Bank Group.

In accordance with Arab Bank Group policies, capitalisation of retained income represents the main source of growth in shareholders' equity. Consequently, the Group has to confine the cash dividends distributed to the shareholders within certain limits on the one hand while constantly improving its profitability on the other hand.

The continuous development of equity also aims to meet the growing needs of the branches and subsidiaries. At the end of 1997, total shareholders' equity reached USD 1,570.9 million representing an improvement of 12.0% over the previous year's figures. It amounted to 9.6% of average total assets compared to 9.3% in 1996. The following table shows the calculation of the capital adequacy ratio according to the BIS rules, at the end of 1997 and 1996.

	1997	1996	Variance
	In USD millions %		
Equity (*)			
Tier 1	1,259.8	1,112.3	147.5 13.3
Tier 2	437.3	358.2	79.1 22.1
Risk weighted assets	10,421.9	9,138.0	1,283.9 14.1
Capital adequacy ratio	16.28%	16.09%	0.19% 1.2

(*) Group equity minus reserves with associated companies.

The above normal capital adequacy ratio is justified, in view of the continuous demand of the regulatory authorities for capital funding of one operating unit.

Performance of the Group's Entities
The Group's consolidated financial statements include the financial statements of Arab Bank Plc, Arab Bank (Switzerland), a sister company wholly owned by the shareholders of Arab Bank Plc, and the following wholly and majority owned subsidiaries:
- Arab Bank AG, Frankfurt, wholly owned subsidiary
- Arab Bank Australia Ltd., wholly owned subsidiary
- Arab Bank (Austria) AG, wholly owned subsidiary
- Arab Bank Maroc, wholly owned subsidiary
- Arab Tunisian Bank, 64.24% owned
- Arab Palestinian Investment Bank, 55% owned.

Arab Bank Plc
Arab Bank Plc was established in 1930. It is registered in Jordan as a public shareholding company. Arab Bank Plc is one of the principal financial institutions in the Arab world and ranks among the leading international banks in terms of equity, earnings and assets. It is engaged in providing a wide variety of financial services, which include retail banking, private banking, trade financing, merchant banking, commercial real estate lending and Islamic banking.
Results of operations
Net income after tax reached JOD 107.7 million, representing an increase of JOD 12.0 million or 12.5% over 1996. The following table contains the comparative figures of the revenue components:

	1997	1996	Variance
	In JOD millions %		
Net interest	227.3	220.0	7.3 3.3
Net commission	61.6	59.2	2.4 4.1
Foreign exchange	10.8	12.1	(1.3) (11.0)
Other revenue	36.4	27.3	9.1 33.5
Total	336.1	318.6	17.5 5.5

Operating expenses increased by JOD 11.5 million or 7.5% to reach JOD 165.2 million from JOD 153.7 million in 1996. Changes in the main components of operating expenses are presented in the following table:

	1997	1996	Variance
	In JOD millions %		
Staff	89.5	84.0	5.5 6.6
Information system	13.6	12.8	0.8 6.5
Depreciation	10.9	9.9	1.0 9.6
Other operating expenses	51.2	47.0	4.2 8.9
Total	165.2	153.7	11.5 7.5

Financial position
The shareholders' equity rose by JOD 90.0 million to reach JOD 720.0 million, a 14.3% increase over the figure of JOD 630.0 million in 1996. The capital adequacy ratio for the Bank at the end of 1997 was 12.37% compared to 14.24% at the end of 1996. Customer deposits improved in 1997 to reach JOD 6,760.0 million from JOD 6,396.6 million in 1996. Total external funds including deposits from banks rose to JOD 9,630.0 million compared to JOD 9,298.5 million in 1996, representing an improvement of JOD 331.5 million or 3.5%. Total assets increased by JOD 423.0 million or 4.1%. A comparative analysis of Arab Bank assets in 1997 and 1996 is presented below:

	1997	1996	Variance
	In JOD millions %		
Assets			
Cash and marketable securities	4,785.6	5,192.4	(406.8) (7.8)
Loans and advance	4,672.4	4,163.3	509.1 12.2
All other assets	1,303.1	982.4	320.7 32.7
Total	10,761.1	10,338.1	423.0 4.1

Other achievements

Excellence in client service was the top objective of the Bank in 1997. The management also endeavours to continue improving the technical and professional abilities of the staff as well as to complement the branch and subsidiary network and to develop information technology.

To meet the increasing demands of clients, Arab Bank with other partners established in 1997 "Arab Investment Company (Egypt) S.A.E." The subscription rate to this investment product was 250%. During 1997, Arab Bank's Personal Banking Unit drove forward a new strategy designed to ensure that the Bank maintains its competitive edge in the fast changing financial services marketplace and becomes more focused on the needs of its customers. The development and marketing of a new range of investment products for existing and new customers is a key pillar of the new personal banking strategy. The new products are designed to provide an alternative to deposit and savings activities and are being structured to appeal to differing investment requirements, varying in complexity and level of risk. The first product launched in the Middle East, a relatively low risk Capital Guaranteed Fund, has proved extremely popular, attracting over USD 100 million of investors' funds. Early in 1998, The Islamic International Arab Bank Plc started its operations through its four branches in Jordan. The Bank plans to expand its operations to other Arab and Islamic countries.

One of the prime objectives of the Bank is to enhance its staff's abilities. The total number of employees reached 5,468 in addition to the employees of its subsidiaries, sister institution and affiliates. Specialised training programmes in asset/liability management and managerial leadership were some of the many training events held in 1997.

In 1997, Arab Bank formulated a plan to re-engineer its services and business processes through the use of the latest technologies in order to enhance services and improve efficiency and competitiveness. Execution of the plan will start at the beginning of 1998 in coordination and cooperation with all branches. Arab Bank has always kept abreast of the continuous changes in technology, and directed information systems to improve customer services. It has continued to enhance the Arab Bank website. Internet users can now view the Arab Bank Internet website "arabbank.com" in Arabic as well as in English. Communications are being upgraded by moving from a rigid to an open network architecture. Optimum solutions are continuously identified and implemented to improve the capacity, reliability, security and manageability of the global and local networks. Swift financial service has been further improved across Arab Bank branches worldwide through the use of more advanced communication protocols.

The Bank continued to extend its regional and international presence. The management succeeded in its negotiations to purchase the 50% ownership of its Moroccan partner in Arab Bank Maroc, Arab Bank Maroc, including its eight branches, thus became a fully owned subsidiary of the Group. Furthermore, three new branches were opened in Palestine, one in Cairo, Egypt, and two in Yemen.

Arab Bank (Switzerland)

Arab Bank (Switzerland) was constituted in 1962 as an independent Swiss company. Its shareholders are identical to those of Arab Bank Plc. The Bank has been cooperating with all members of the Arab Bank Group throughout its existence.

Arab Bank (Switzerland) has built a reputation for efficient and personal service. One of the Bank's key concerns remains the further enhancement of its services, in particular in the field of private banking in which a "Global Private Banking Unit" has been set up to market the wide variety of the Bank's investment products.

Performance in 1997

Net income for 1997 of CHF 17.5 million was at the same level as in 1996. Interest income decreased by CHF 4.5 million or 20.6% as a result of the persistent decline of the Swiss Franc interest rates, which affected the return from investment of shareholders' equity.

Results from trading operations increased again, by CHF 1.1 million or 17.7% to CHF 7.3 million, owing to better results achieved in foreign exchange and precious metals trading. Results from commission and service fee activities rose by CHF 1.9 million or 11.5% to CHF 18.5 million.

Total assets as at 31 December 1997 increased by CHF 146.4 million to CHF 1,626.9 million owing to the weaker Swiss Franc against the US Dollar and to a higher volume of interbank business.

Arab Bank Australia Limited

Arab Bank Australia Limited operates under an unrestricted banking authority granted by the Reserve Bank of Australia in September 1994. Arab Bank Australia Limited is subject to the prudential requirements of the Reserve Bank of Australia and its strategic aim is to provide retail and commercial banking facilities to the Arab community in Sydney, Australia. In addition, it provides trade services to major Australian corporations trading with the Middle East.

Arab Bank Australia Limited provides a comprehensive range of banking services, including electronic banking, and a full range of deposit products and specialised lending products, including leasing, which have been tailored to meet the requirements of our customers.

Profit before tax in 1997 was AUD 1.5 million compared to AUD 1.3 million in 1996. The profit for 1997 also included a general provision for doubtful debts of AUD 0.6 million. In a highly competitive banking environment the Bank was able to increase income by 7% and hold operating expenses increase to 4%.

The balance sheet showed total assets at the end of 1997 standing at AUD 274 million, which is an increase of AUD 68 million over the 1996 figure. Deposits and other liabilities grew from AUD 154 million in 1996 to AUD 220 million in 1997.

The Bank continues to develop its Australian operations and is planning to establish a new branch in Melbourne, Victoria in 1998.

Arab Bank (Austria) AG

Arab Bank (Austria) AG was established in February 1987 in Vienna and commenced its operations in May the same year. Arab Bank (Austria) AG is an independent Austrian bank with an unrestricted licence to perform all banking activities out of any location within the European Union. It provides a wide range of services to individuals, corporate and institutional clients, government agencies and other international financial institutions.

One of its key missions is to develop the Group's relationships with Eastern Europe and Russia. For several years now it has been offering services to our customers such as the financing of trade, information on investment opportunities and the introduction of appropriate partners in that area.

Compared to the previous year the Bank's balance sheet reflected an overall growth in activity, profits and reserves. Deposits from customers increased by 13.2% to reach ATS 1.1 billion, and total loans increased to ATS 253.3 million from ATS 88.5 million.

Arab Bank AG, Frankfurt

Arab Bank AG, a wholly owned subsidiary of Arab Bank Group, commenced operations in 1993 with a full commercial banking licence. Accordingly, Arab Bank AG plays a significant role in promoting Arab-German trade and economic cooperation. It provides its customers with a wide range of banking services, including investments and treasury products.

Given its location in Frankfurt where the European Central Bank will start its operations later in 1998, the German subsidiary is actively preparing for the Euro Conversion scheduled to commence on January 1, 1999.

In 1997 the Bank made a total profit before tax of DEM 2.3 million. Total assets grew by DEM 182 million to DEM 724 million. The total balance sheet including contra accounts rose to DEM 1,390 million, which is an increase of DEM 528 million over 1996. Total capital funds of Arab Bank AG amount to DEM 98.0 million.

The Bank primarily offers its services to German corporations dealing with the Arab world. In 1997 relationships with major German project engineering and construction companies doing business in the Middle East were expanded substantially. Correspondent banking relationships were further developed with banks in Arab countries and in other areas, primarily in Turkey. The service capabilities include letters of credit, money markets and foreign exchange dealings.

Arab Bank Maroc

In 1975, in accordance with the Moroccan nationalisation law, the branches of Arab Bank in Morocco were transferred into Arab Bank Maroc, a limited liability company. On an equal basis, Banque Centrale Populaire and Arab Bank Plc held the share capital of the company. In 1997, with the liberalisation of the financial market in Morocco, Arab Bank bought back the share of its Moroccan partner. Arab Bank Maroc has eight branches, and provides its customers with a wide range of commercial and private banking activities.

The Bank achieved good financial results in 1997. Total assets increased by 2% to reach MAD 2,114.0 million from MAD 2,073.2 million in the previous year. Income before tax reached MAD 10.5 million compared to MAD

1.8 million in the previous year. The growth represented 483.3%.

It is expected that the Bank will participate in linking North African countries with the network of Arab Bank Group. Most importantly, the Bank is planning to play a more active role in serving its customers as well as in developing the Moroccan economy.

The Bank's strategic plans are linked with those of Arab Bank Group. A major expansion covering the main cities in Morocco is targeted for 1998.

Arab Tunisian Bank

Arab Tunisian Bank was incorporated in 1982. It is a leading private commercial bank, playing a crucial role in the development of Tunisia's national economy. The Bank offers well-established local and international services through its 29 branch domestic network and 7 affiliated companies.

The performance achieved during 1997 confirms that Arab Tunisian Bank has taken a new step in the progression towards its corporate goals. The Bank's business grew steadily in 1997 and produced strong results across the main activities. The balance sheet growth has been further strengthened passing from TND 776.3 million in 1996 to TND 796.3 million in 1997, recording an increase of 2.6%. Gross income grew from TND 16.1 million to TND 19.0 million in 1997 which represents 18.0%. Net income increased in 1997 to TND 8.3 million representing an increase of 12.2% over the previous year.

In addition to its strong financial performance, the Bank has upgraded its information technology to shift the priority from back office to top management. To achieve the new goal, two ambitious programmes were initiated. First, the existing management information systems were overhauled with the assistance of a well-known international consultancy firm. Second, a document management system, designed to improve the information flow and the control of electronic files, was installed.

Arab Palestinian Investment Bank

Arab Palestinian Investment Bank obtained its license from the Palestinian authorities on March 17, 1997. The capital of the Bank amounts to USD 20 million, owned by Arab Bank Plc - 55%, International Finance Corporation (IFC) - 25%, Deutsche Investitions- und Entwicklungsgesellschaft mbH (DEG) - 15%, and Enterprise Investment Company (EIC) - 5%.

Recruitment of qualified personnel was the first task of the Bank's management. It now has the main core of young qualified personnel in the fields of project financing, treasury services and investment advisory services.

The Bank focused its activities during 1997 on project financing. The total value of committed loans reached USD 8 million of projects amounting to approximately USD 30 million. The Bank's loan portfolio is distributed in the economic sectors with the following breakdown: industry 41%, tourism and services 52% and agriculture 7%.

Customers' deposits amounted at year-end to USD 1.2 million. The minimum accepted deposits are USD 10,000 for a period of not less than one month. During its first year of operation, the Bank was able to achieve a small positive amount of income of USD 11,400.

The Bank will continue its efforts to fill a significant gap in providing medium- and long-term funds for investment projects in Palestine. It is studying new services and products to be introduced to its clients in the near future.

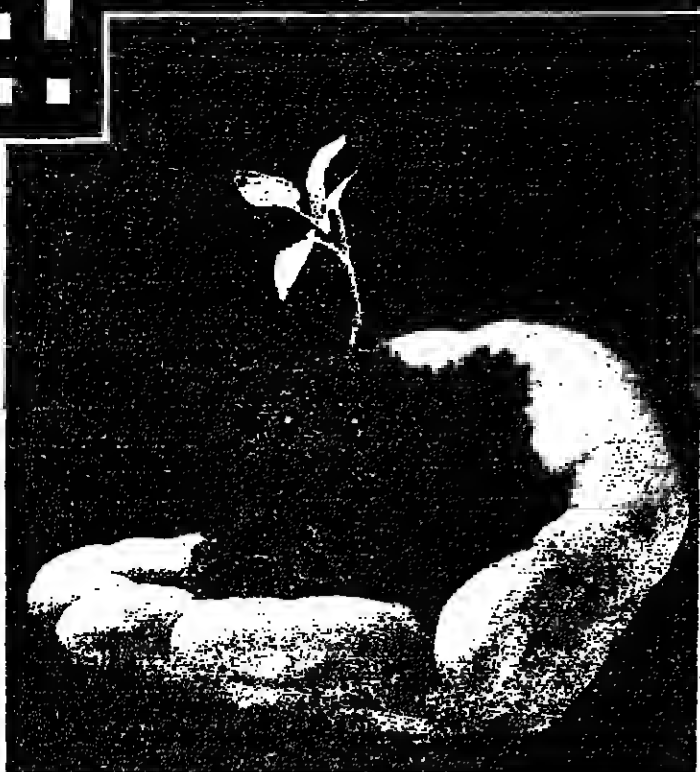
ARAB BANK PLC GENERAL ASSEMBLY AGENDA

First : Annual Ordinary General Assembly.

1. Presentation and adoption of the Minutes of the previous 67th meeting of the General Assembly.
2. Presentation of the report of the Board of Directors for the year 1997 and outlook for 1998.
3. Presentation of the Auditors' Report on the financial statements of the Bank for the financial year 1997.
4. Presentation and approval of the financial statements of the Bank for the year 1997 and adoption of the recommendation of the Board of Directors to distribute a dividend for the year 1997 at the rate of JOD 4.0 per share, being 40% of the nominal value of JOD 10 per share.
5. Release of the members of the Board of Directors from liability for the year 1997.
6. Election of the new Board of Directors for a four-year term starting from the date of election.
7. Election of the Bank's Auditors for the year 1998 and determination of their remuneration.
8. Other issues.

Second : Extraordinary General Assembly

1. a) Amendment of Article no.(6) of the Bank's Charter of Association and By-Laws to read as follows: "The company capital is composed of JOD 88,000,000 divided into 8,800,000 shares of nominal value of JOD 10 per share"
- b) The accomplishment of the capital increase of JOD 44,000,000 by transferring the amount to capital from voluntary reserve.
- c) The distribution of the new 4,400,000 shares to the shareholders of the General Assembly in accordance with the regulation of the Jordanian Security and Exchange Commission no. (2) of 1997.
- d) Dividends will be payable on the income of the period starting January 1, 1998.
2. To approve the purchase of the remaining 50% of the shareholders' equity in Arab Bank Maroc from Banque Centrale Populaire, thus increasing the shareholding of Arab Bank Plc to 100%.



ARAB BANK GROUP

Some 68 years ago we planted a seed for future growth to aid the local people in the region in their endeavours to build a comfortable and secure future. That seed has grown, enabling us to give financial services on a global scale to many people around the world. To date we have over 370 branches and offices worldwide and our asset strength has never been stronger, leaving us in a prime position to greet the millennium with open arms.

Balance Sheet as of 31 December 1997 and 1996

Assets	1997 US\$ ('000)	1996 US\$ ('000)
Cash and due from banks	3 664 933	4 272 371
Funds with central banks	1 974 840	1 750 741
Government securities	1 049 930	912 919
Trading securities	181 990	165 970
Loans and advances (Net)	7 578 519	6 829 633
Long-term investments (Net)	1 733 118	1 534 317
Fixed assets (Net)	141 621	98 699
Other assets	483 433	338 799
Total Assets	16 808 384	15 903 449
Customers' liability on guarantees, letters of credit and other contingencies	5 694 439	4 883 187
Total	22 502 823	20 786 636

Income Statement for the years ended 31 December 1997 and 1996

	1997 US\$ ('000)	1996 US\$ ('000)
Interest income	1 244 348	1 252 857
Commission income	111 536	111 807
Less: Interest expense	811 998	834 214
Commission expense	3 854	4 483
Net interest and commission	540 032	525 967
Less: Provision for doubtful debts and investments	45 870	51 580
Net interest and commission after provision	494 162	474 387
Plus: Foreign exchange trading	25 624	25 518
Other income	57 726	41 507
	577 512	541 412
Less: General and administrative expenses	282 311	268 065
Net income before tax	295 201	273 347
Income tax	74 429	75 529
Net income	220 772	197 818
Appropriation:-		
Net income	220 772	197 818
Retained earnings brought forward	483	5 763
Total	221 255	203 581
To statutory reserve	766	852
To voluntary reserve	39 489	39 606
To general reserve	114 861	96 844
To reserves with associated companies	31 367	33 559
Proposed cash dividends	32 474	32 159
Directors' remunerations	78	78
Retained Earnings Carried Forward	2 220	483
Total appropriation	221 255	203 581

Liabilities and Shareholders' Equity	1997 US\$ ('000)	1996 US\$ ('000)
Customer deposits	10 404 932	9 680 749
Bank deposits	3 204 194	3 303 474
Borrowed funds	14 036	24 060
Cash margin	712 322	598 104
Provisions	347 079	369 660
Proposed dividends and remunerations	32 552	32 237
Other liabilities	522 325	492 706
Total Liabilities	15 237 440	14 500 990
Shareholders' Equity		
Capital	84 897	84 897
Statutory reserve	79 532	78 766
Voluntary reserve	258 325	218 836
General reserve	853 487	738 626
Reserves with associated companies	343 234	311 867
Retained earnings	2 220	483
Total	1 621 695	1 433 475
Translation adjustments	(50 751)	(31 016)
Total Shareholders' Equity	1 570 944	1 402 459
Total liabilities and Shareholders' Equity	16 808 384	15 903 449
Guarantees, letters of credit and other contingencies	5 694 439	4 883 187
Total	22 502 823	20 786 636

Sister, Subsidiary & Associated Companies

Arab Bank	Percentage of Ownership
Arab Bank (Switzerland) - Zurich, Geneva	100%
Arab Bank Australia - Sydney	100%
Arab Bank (Austria) AG - Vienna	100%
Arab Bank AG - Frankfurt/Germany	100%
Arab Bank Maroc-Morocco	100%
Islamic International Arab Bank	100%
Finance, Accountancy, Mohassaba S.A	100%
Arab Tunisian Bank-Tunis	64%
Arab Palestinian Investment Bank, Palestine	55%
Oman Arab Bank-Oman	49%
Arab National Bank-Saudi Arabia	40%
Arabia Insurance co., Lebanon	37%
Egyptian Financial Group For Portfolio management	33%
Commercial Building Co., Lebanon	30%

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ARAB BANK PLC

Balance Sheet as of 31 December 1997 and 1996

	1997	1996
Assets	JD ('000)	JD ('000)
Cash and due from banks	2 704 365	3 247 036
Funds with central banks	1 334 142	1 205 416
Government securities	719 186	715 993
Trading securities	27 872	23 989
Loans and advances (Net)	4 672 390	4 163 339
Long-term investments (Net)	927 516	727 654
Fixed assets (Net)	81 362	56 620
Other assets	294 242	198 088
Total Assets	10 761 075	10 338 135
Customers' liability on guarantees, letters of credit and other contingencies	3 628 620	3 143 859
Total	14 389 695	13 481 994

	1997	1996
Liabilities and Shareholders' Equity	JD ('000)	JD ('000)
Customer deposits	6 759 994	6 396 576
Bank deposits	2 371 558	2 472 452
Borrowed funds	9 683	17 064
Cash margin	488 766	412 443
Provisions	141 610	146 645
Proposed dividends and remunerations	17 655	17 655
Other liabilities	251 809	245 300
Total Liabilities	10 041 075	9 708 135
Capital	44 000	44 000
Statutory reserve	44 000	44 000
Voluntary reserve	170 000	142 000
General reserve	462 000	400 000
Total Shareholders' Equity	720 000	630 000
Total Liabilities and Shareholders' Equity	10 761 075	10 338 135
Guarantees, letters of credit and other contingencies	3 628 620	3 143 859
Total	14 389 695	13 481 994

Income Statement for the years ended 31 December 1997 and 1996

	1997	1996
	JD ('000)	JD ('000)
Interest income	733 202	745 458
Commission income	63 799	61 711
Less: Interest expense	505 949	525 462
Commission expense	2 155	2 538
Net interest and commission	288 897	279 169
Less: Provision for doubtful debts and investments	25 268	28 715
Net interest and Commission after provision	263 629	250 454
Plus: Foreign exchange trading	10 764	12 090
Other income	36 446	27 303
	310 839	289 847
Less: General and administrative expenses	165 192	153 697
Net income before tax	145 647	136 150
Income tax	37 992	40 495
Net income	107 655	95 655
Appropriation:		
To voluntary reserve	28 000	26 000
To general reserve	62 000	52 000
Proposed cash dividends	17 600	17 600
Directors' remunerations	55	55
Total Appropriation	107 655	95 655

Cash Flow Statement for the years ended 31 December 1997 and 1996

	1997	1996
	JD ('000)	JD ('000)
Cash flow from operating activities:		
Interest and commission received	835 810	807 837
Interest and commission paid	(498 701)	(525 866)
General and administrative expenses paid	(154 320)	(143 776)
Net cash provided from (used in) operations before changes in assets and liabilities	182 789	138 195
(Increase) decrease in assets:		
Loans and advances	(532 087)	(476 372)
Trading securities	(3 883)	618
Other assets	(87 753)	(64 956)
Increase (decrease) in liabilities:		
Customer deposits	363 418	599 238
Bank deposits	(100 894)	286 484
Cash margin	76 323	41 640
Other liabilities	(5 899)	65 854
Net cash provided from (used in) operations before income tax	(107 986)	590 701
Income tax paid	(40 495)	(30 649)
Net cash provided from (used in) operations	(148 481)	560 052
Cash flow from investing activities:		
(Purchase) sale of fixed assets	(35 614)	(14 385)
(Purchase) sale of investments securities	(201 621)	(171 837)
(Purchase) sale of government securities	(3 193)	(48 128)
Net cash provided from (used in) investing activities	(240 428)	(234 350)
Cash flow from financing activities:		
Borrowed funds from Central Banks	(7 381)	(4 389)
Dividends paid to shareholders	(17 655)	(15 455)
Net cash provided from (used in) financing activities	(25 036)	(19 844)
Net increase (decrease) in cash	(413 945)	305 858
Cash and cash equivalent at beginning of year	4 452 452	4 146 594
Cash and cash equivalent at end of year	4 038 507	4 452 452

Conversion rates of foreign currencies against the Jordanian Dinar for consolidation purposes

Currency	End 1997	End 1996
Bahraini Dinar	0.532	0.532
Cyprus Pound	0.741	0.663
French Franc	8.439	7.388
Greek Drachma	398.480	348.298
Italian Lire	2 480.160	2 156.800
Korean Won	1 995.430	1 190.320
Lebanese Pound	2 153.070	2 188.320

Currency	End 1997	End 1996
Pound Sterling	0.850	0.834
Qatari Riyal	5.130	5.130
Spanish Peseta	213.900	185.098
U.A.E. Dirham	5.180	5.180
U.S. Dollar	1.410	1.410
Yemeni Riyal	184.230	178.940

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ARAB BANK PLC

Balance Sheet of Jordan Branches as of 31 December 1997 and 1996

	1997 JD	1996 JD
Assets		
Cash and due from Banks	1 038 932 072	1 030 234 727
Funds with Central Bank of Jordan	782 240 464	757 623 426
Government Securities	31 631 408	29 511 698
Loans and Advances (Net)	820 528 970	829 219 254
Marketable Securities (Net)	56 129 749	31 034 659
Fixed Assets (Net)	19 550 313	19 376 449
Other Assets	111 737 929	14 364 751
Total	2 860 750 905	2 711 364 964

Profit and Loss Statement for the years ended 31 December 1997 and 1996

	1997 JD	1996 JD
Revenue		
Interest income	199 606 261	192 480 200
Commission income	18 689 470	17 444 802
Less:		
Interest expense	141 137 489	128 253 653
Commission expense	369 318	327 346
Net interest & Commission	76 788 924	81 344 003
Plus:		
Income from:		
Securities Portfolio	765 407	878 089
Foreign Exchange Trading	1 912 192	1 686 867
Other income	1 945 344	2 076 945
Increase in the provisions for loans & advances	2 102 732	-
Less:		
Provisions for Loans & Advances	-	2 500 000
Provisions for Share Losses	1 500 000	4 000 000
Loan losses	292 549	307 603
General and Administrative Expenses	41 823 519	36 649 112
Amortisation of International Islamic Arab Bank fees	3 250 000	-
Income Before Tax	36 648 531	42 529 189
Income Tax	(16 188 000)	20 277 305
Net income	20 460 531	22 251 884
Appropriations :-		
To Voluntary Reserve	-	8 505 838
To General Reserve	3 887 561	-
To Universities Fees	366 485	425 292
To Provision for Scientific Research	366 485	425 292
Profit Transferred to H.O.	15 840 000	12 895 462
Total	20 460 531	22 251 884

	1997 JD	1996 JD
Liabilities & Shareholders' Equity		
Customers' Deposits	2 259 619 826	2 134 612 967
Banks' Deposits	204 401 633	239 211 888
Borrowed Funds	129 960	89 720
Cash Margins	162 688 913	134 333 797
Provisions	19 446 945	27 046 857
Other Liabilities	95 901 070	81 394 738
Total Liabilities	2 742 188 347	2 616 689 967
Capital	44 000 000	44 000 000
Statutory Reserve	8 441 527	8 441 527
Voluntary Reserve	44 000 000	34 179 265
General Reserve	22 121 031	8 054 205
Total Shareholders' Equity	118 562 558	94 674 997
Total Liabilities and Shareholders' Equity	2 860 750 905	2 711 364 964

Cash Flow Statement for the years ended 31 December 1997 and 1996

	1997 JD	1996 JD
Cash flow from operating activities		
Interest and commission received	219 305 766	212 974 275
Interest and income paid	(141 522 851)	(125 633 611)
General and administrative expenses paid	(43 045 950)	(35 004 873)
Cash flow from (used in) operations before changes in assets and liabilities	34 736 965	52 335 791
(Increase) decrease in assets		
Loans and advances	10 500 467	(20 269 004)
Other assets	(94 393 940)	6 056 793
Increase (decrease) in liabilities		
Current and demand deposits	24 023 955	(49 751 840)
Savings and time deposits	100 982 904	130 134 758
Bank deposits	(34 810 255)	42 334 880
Cash margin	28 355 116	9 053 799
Other liabilities	11 578 475	13 684 382
Other provisions	(425 292)	(828 570)
Net cash flow from (used in) operations before tax	80 548 395	182 750 989
Income taxes paid	(24 095 590)	(17 813 860)
Net cash flow from (used in) operations activities	56 452 805	164 937 129
Cash flow from investing activities		
(Purchase) of fixed assets	(2 327 356)	(2 835 904)
(Purchase) of investment securities	(26 595 090)	(10 352 900)
Sale of government securities	(2 119 710)	2 287 530
Dividends received	758 956	835 639
Net cash flow from (used in) investing activities	(30 283 200)	(10 065 635)
Cash flow from financing activities:		
Borrowed funds from Central Bank of Jordan	40 240	(19 788)
Profit transferred to H.O.	(12 895 462)	-
Voluntary Reserve	9 820 735	-
General Reserve	10 179 265	-
Net cash flow from (used in) financing activities	7 144 778	(19 788)
Net increase (decrease) in cash	33 314 383	154 851 706
Cash and due from banks at beginning of the year	1 787 858 153	1 633 006 447
Cash and due from banks at end of the year	1 821 172 536	1 787 858 153

AUDITORS' REPORT

To the Shareholders of Arab Bank Plc
Amman - Jordan

We have audited the accompanying balance sheet of Arab Bank Plc (a Jordanian Public Shareholding Limited Company) as of 31 December 1997 and 1996 and the related statements of income and cash flows for the years then ended. These financial statements are the responsibility of the Bank's management. Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these financial statements based on our audit. We have obtained the information and explanations which to the best of our knowledge and belief were necessary for the purpose of our audit.

We conducted our audit in accordance with the International Standards on Auditing. Those Standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance as to whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement. An audit includes examining, on a test basis, evidence supporting the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. An audit also includes assessing the accounting principles used and significant estimates made by management, as well as evaluating the overall financial statements presentation. We believe that our audit provides a reasonable basis for our opinion.

The Bank maintains proper accounting records which are in agreement with the accompanying financial statements and with the financial information included in the Board of Directors' Report.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Arab Bank Plc as of 31 December 1997 and 1996 and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with International Accounting Standards, and we recommend that the General Assembly approve these financial statements.

Amman - Jordan
24 January 1998

Saba & Co.

حسابات



ARAB BANK PLC

ARAB BANK BRANCHES, SISTER, SUBSIDIARY AND ASSOCIATED COMPANIES

ARAB BANK PLC							
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11 Oscars for the Big Boat Sinking ship wins big

By Patrick Goldstein

HOLLYWOOD—It was a night to remember for "Titanic." The epic drama about two lovers aboard the ill-fated 1912 luxury liner continued its passage into film history by winning best picture at Monday night's 70th annual Academy Awards at the Shrine Auditorium.

The film, which recently supplanted "Star Wars" as the highest-grossing film in Hollywood history, earned 11 Oscars, tying 1959's "Ben Hur" as the most honored film in Academy history. "Titanic's" Oscar haul included best picture, cinematography, film editing, sound, costume design and art directing, as well as a best director Oscar for James Cameron.

Cameron has enjoyed box-office success with "Aliens," the two "Terminator" movies and "True Lies," but had never received a nomination for his work. Monday night, he also shared an Oscar for best editing, the first time a director has won in both categories.

The Oscar wins represented an emotional triumph for Cameron, whose name was repeated like a mantra in thank-you speeches over the course of the evening. His three-hour-plus film had been a subject of considerable second-guessing and controversy, especially when its \$200 million budget appeared to have killed any chance of the film making its money back for 20th Century Fox and Paramount Pictures, the two studios that co-financed the picture.

Flushed with victory, Cameron howled, "I'm king of the world!" He thanked his cast and his parents, Phillip and Shirley, whom he affectionately dubbed "my original producers."

Accepting the award for best director from presenter Warren Beatty, an obviously elated Cameron chorled, "I don't know about you, but I'm having a really great time." When he returned to accept the best picture award, Cameron was more sober, asking for a few moments of silence for the 1500-odd people who perished on the Titanic.

An odds-on favorite after winning a bevy of awards leading up to the Oscars, "Titanic" joins the ranks of bigger-than-life Oscar-winning epics as "The Bridge on the River Kwai," "Lawrence of Arabia," "Dances with Wolves" and "Braveheart." The film was a labor of love for Cameron, who wrote the script, co-edited and co-produced the film, and spent several weeks in 1995 shooting footage of the real-life Titanic wreckage that was used in the film.

The one area where "Titanic" hit an iceberg was in the acting categories. In what was clearly a popular victory, Jack Nicholson won best actor for his quickly comic performance in the James L.



DiCaprio & Winslet

Brooks film, "As Good as It Gets." This was the third Oscar for the eleven-time nominee, who previously won best actor for 1975's "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" and best supporting actor for Brooks' 1983 film, "Terms of Endearment."

Nicholson, sounding hoarse, joked about "Titanic's" dominance, saying "I've had a sinking feeling all night up to here," adding "we're very proud of the picture." He dedicated his win to a host of heroes, including Miles Davis, Robert Mitchum and J.T. Walsh. "They're not here anymore, but they are in me," he said.

Nicholson's co-star, Helen Hunt, won best actress for her portrayal of a harried single mother who develops an emotional relationship with an eccentric writer, played by Nicholson. Hunt won out over four British actresses, including Golden Globe winner Judi Dench, normally favorites with the Academy.

Winner of two Emmys for her comic role in the TV series, "Mad About You," Hunt originally studied acting with her father, Gordon Hunt, an acting coach and TV director whom she

thanked in her acceptance speech. Her highest praise went to director James L. Brooks, who also co-wrote the film. "I'm here for one reason—Jim Brooks," Hunt said in her acceptance speech. "I thank God for giving me a little piece of you."

With its period costumes and historic significance, "Titanic's" sweeping victory dramatized the nostalgia-fueled ceremony, which honored the 70th anniversary of the Academy Awards. The telecast showcased a reunion of former Oscar winners from the past six decades, including such familiar faces as Sean Connery, Anne Bancroft, Shirley Temple and Robert De Niro, as well as Louise Rainer, who was named best actress in 1936 and 1937.

Honored by the Academy for life achievement, "Singin' in the Rain" director Stanley Donen received a standing ovation, tapdancing and singing "Cheek to Cheek" from "Top Hat," a 1935 hit starring his idol, Fred Astaire, and Ginger Rogers. The telecast kicked off with a 3-minute film featuring clips of all 69 best picture winners. Host Billy Crystal also made a special intro-

duction of 90-year-old Fay Wray, star of the 1933 version of "King Kong."

"Good Will Hunting," which had been touted as a possible best picture dark horse, wasn't shut out entirely. Childhood friends Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, 27 and 25, won original screenplay for the emotional drama about a blue-collar math wizard's struggle to make peace with his own genius.

Best supporting actor went to Robin Williams, as the therapist trying to help Damon. It was Williams' fourth nomination, his first in the best supporting category. In an emotional, but relatively subdued acceptance speech, Williams acknowledged his late father, saying "I want to thank my father, up there, the man who when I said 'I wanted to be an actor,' replied, 'Wonderful, just have a back-up profession, like welding.'" Critics darling "L.A. Confidential" also picked up two statues. Director Curtis Hanson and Brian Helgeland won for best adapted screenplay. And Kim Basinger received supporting actress for her role in the film, playing a high-class call girl who resembled '40s femme fatale Veronica Lake.

She heat out sentimental favorite Gloria Stuart, the 87-year-old actress who played Old Rose in "Titanic." Overcome with joy and surprise with her first Oscar nomination, Basinger also thanked her father, saying "If anyone has a dream out there, please know that I'm living proof that they do come true."

The Full Monty: The evening's underdog contender, only won an Oscar for Anne Dudley's original musical comedy score. James Horner won for his dramatic score for "Titanic," and also for the song, "My Heart Will Go On," which he co-wrote with Will Jennings.

The show ran late, clocking in at nearly three hours and 42-plus minutes, 17 minutes longer than the film "Titanic" and a new Oscar record.

Crystal, hosting his sixth Oscar telecast, opened the program with a film parody of the nominated films, which included him posing nude as Kale Winslet being sketched by Leonardo DiCaprio, dressing in Kim Basinger's frock coat and platinum-blond locks from "L.A. Confidential" and being choked by his friend, Robin Williams, co-star of "Good Will Hunting." Crystal wasn't the only one supplying laughs. Introducing "Titanic" as a best picture nominee, Arnold Schwarzenegger said he had previously made three movies with Cameron, including both "Terminator" films. In what Schwarzenegger termed the director's "early, low-budget an-house phase,"

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Surprise! A subdued Cameron

By Kenneth Turan



Cameron

HOLLYWOOD—"Titanic" has accomplished many things, but nothing so surprising as what it pulled off Monday night when it made a humble and gracious man out of director James Cameron. Sort of. This, after all, is a writer-director-editor not known for working and playing well with others, a situation underlined by the comments of a pair of "Titanic's" Oscar winners. Composer James Horner thanked Cameron for "being in a good mood the day I brought you the song," and one of the picture's quarter of soundmen cracked that he hoped the picture's success would help the filmmaker "attain the self-confidence you need to succeed in this business."

Maybe it was the combined force of all those bearhugs he received as the winners of the film's record-tying 11 Oscars went past him to accept their awards, but Cameron smiled through it all with the geniality of an old-style politician on a Sunday visit to his favorite ward. When Billy Crystal commented, "That cost \$15 million" after a tiny "Titanic" clip, the camera caught Cameron saying, "That's about right."

The director maintained his decorum through his victory in the editing category, letting his two co-winners speak first and then talking about his daughter. And when he won for directing, he tried hard to be on his best behavior, thanking his parents, "my original producers," and saying, "My heart is full to bursting." Then, out of nowhere, came a bellowing "I'm the king of the world" followed by a full-throated roar.

Cameron returned to humility when he accepted the best picture Oscar for "Titanic," asking for a moment of silence for the 1,500 who died when that great ship went down. But, if only for a moment, he'd allowed all who cared to look a glimpse of the kind of unfettered ego necessary to push a film's budget to a record \$200 million and to spend every last penny of it exactly his way.

While on most Oscar nights people are busy adding up how many categories the top film is going to take, on this night everyone was subtracting. "Titanic" had 14 nominations and it couldn't lose more than two if it was going to beat "Ben Hur's"

decades-old record. Since most Oscar prognosticators had predicted (correctly, as it turned out) losses in the actress and makeup races, the loss that in effect kept "Titanic" from the record was Gloria Stuart's in the supporting actress battle.

The victory for "L.A. Confidential's" Kim Basinger not only led to one of the most moving of the night's acceptance speeches, it also provided an early key to how the voting would go. Basinger won not only because she gave the best and most affecting performance of her 20-something film career, not only because her film was deservedly popular, with the academy, but also because this year the voters were apparently in the mood to take care of their own.

So Helen Hunt, who gave the best speech of the night, defeated four British actresses. So Robin Williams, as well as a figure as today's Hollywood has, defeated comeback kid Burt Reynolds. And even though Jack Nicholson was competing against an industry veteran such as Robert Duvall, no one represents Inside Hollywood as much as this man.

For those who admire Williams' unequalled genius, as a comedian and are frustrated by the middle-of-the-road, tree-hugger roles he invariably takes in film, his victory Monday to the best supporting actor category was an occasion for mixed

emotions. On the one hand, it was impossible not to appreciate and share in the pleasure Williams took in winning the Oscar, as well as the pleasure the film community felt in finally giving him one after three previous losses. But seeing the moments of manic comic brilliance, like the Groco Marx duck walk he morphed into as he moved off-stage, reinforced how unfortunate it is that that side of his ability rarely makes it on screen.

While almost everyone—even best foreign language film director Mike van Diem, who called one of his stars "the Titanic of Dutch actors"—felt compelled to make a reference to the evening's big winner, many of the evening's most memorable snapshots had little to do with that film. Moments from the fresh-faced exuberance of youngsters Ben Affleck and Matt Damon as they tried to remember who to thank after their "Good Will Hunting" screenplay victory to the tap dancing grace of special Oscar winner Stanley Donen, just weeks shy of his 74th birthday, showed why glib program, its enormous laugh notwithstanding, gives live television a good name.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Ahead of the curve

At Cerruti, Rodriguez attracted the praise of the fashion press and savvy stores. His casually assembled sportswear pieces hit a magical middle ground. Their sophistication was beyond a college girl's grasp, comprehensible to only the hippest matron. Models loved his sexy, clingy clothes and didn't conceal their admiration as they walked the runway. They even wore them when not on the job.

By Mimi Avins

LOS ANGELES—Narciso Rodriguez grew up in a polyglot neighborhood in Newark, N.J. USA in the '60s and '70s. Like any child who naturally adapts to his environment, he didn't consider the Cuban, Portuguese, black, Spanish and Italian communities surrounding him charming or exotic—life in a city energized by its proximity to Manhattan was all he knew. But today, as an American fashion designer who works in New York, Milan, Madrid and Paris, he's grateful for his early exposure to a variety of ethnic groups with strong visual identities.

"Maybe I feel comfortable in Madrid because I'm Latin," he says. "Maybe that's why I love the idea of being a citizen of the world."

His perspective, which focuses more on people's similarities than differences, is partially responsible for his success. Rodriguez, 37, was named best new designer of the year by the New York-based Council of Fashion Designers of America in February. Last year, VH1 gave him a comparative honor at its fashion awards ceremony. And he had already attracted an avalanche of attention for designing the most famous wedding dress of the decade for Kennedy bride Carolyn Bessette.

Now his first collection under his own name is selling out of stores like Neiman Marcus and Barney's and was shown earlier this month in Milan. Later in Paris, he presented his debut collection for Azzore, a 150-year-old Spanish leather-goods house owned by the largest luxury goods company in the world.

On a rainy Los Angeles night in February, he talked about his design philosophy

before greeting customers at Neiman Marcus in Beverly Hills. "I don't believe in categories of clothes—day, night, work, play," he said. "I just design

careless and friendly. Wearing a long-sleeved white T-shirt and loose black trousers, his dark hair askew, he cut a curious figure for someone whose work is infused with world-

bearing his name was sewn into a garment. While still in high school, he began working as a tailor's apprentice and studying at the Parsons School of Design in New York. At 21, he left Parsons to work under Donna Karan and Louis Dell'Olfo at Anne Klein. In six years at Anne Klein, then the epitome of a successful, widely marketed American collection, Rodriguez worked up to head designer under Dell'Olfo.

Karan had left to start her own line in 1986. He moved on to Calvin Klein in 1991, where he spent the next four years. There his knowledge of marketing, advertising and image-building grew.

Although he was an anonymous member of Klein's design studio, Rodriguez was beginning to become known within the industry. He began receiving offers from other companies and in 1995 left to inaugurate a ready-to-wear line for TSE, maker of fine cashmere sweaters.

Rodriguez thought he could manage the job at TSE while designing the women's collection for Cerruti, a respected European men-wear producer that counted Clint Eastwood and Jack Nicholson among its customers. After one season, he was devoting all his time to Cerruti. Company patriarch Nino Cerruti has a fine eye for talent: Giorgio Armani was his assistant for eight years before starting his own business.

At Cerruti, Rodriguez attracted the praise of the fashion press and savvy stores. His casually assembled sportswear pieces hit a magical middle ground. Their sophistication was beyond a college girl's grasp, comprehensible to only the hippest matron. Models loved his sexy, clingy clothes and didn't conceal their admiration as they walked the runway. They even wore them

when not on the job.

Years of training on Seventh Avenue brought Rodriguez to a place where he could create clothes relaxed and elegant enough to shelter Kate Moss on her day off. For many designers, that would constitute professional heaven. But after showing two highly praised Cerruti collections at a Beaux-Arts auditorium on the Parisian Left Bank, he moved.

A friend from his Calvin Klein days, Carolyn Bessette, asked him to design her wedding dress. The groom's name was John F. Kennedy Jr. The wedding gown, a simple, bias-cut slink of pearl-colored satin, attracted an avalanche of publicity. "It was something I did for one of my dearest friends," Rodriguez says. "I would be a fool to say that the attention that it brought my work, which looks very different from that dress, wasn't positive. But, at a certain point we just stopped talking to the press about it."

Other matters were pressing—a month after the Kennedy wedding, Rodriguez had a Cerruti collection to present in Paris. It contained no bias-cut evening dresses. "That was something very separate, for a friend," he said. "When people came to my show, they saw real clothes for real women—the same type of thing I had presented the season before. And I'm still doing that. I'm not a wedding gown designer, and I would never capitalize on a situation like that."

Yet Rodriguez had been thrust into the spotlight. Professional suitors pursued him, and after one more collection, he decided not to renew his contract with Cerruti.

The Loewe job, secured a few months later, put him in the same league with John Galiano and Alexander McQueen, designers working for the Dior and Givenchy divisions of the



"I just design clothing that is comfortable and easy in the most luxurious manner," says fashion designer Narciso Rodriguez. photo by Lawrence K. Ho.

clothing that is comfortable and easy in the most luxurious manner. My clothes will always be feminine, and have a sensuality about them."

Rodriguez's appearance is



Model is wearing a dress designed by fashion designer Narciso Rodriguez. photo by Lawrence K. Ho.

same firm that owns Loewe (pronounced loo-AY-vay). His signature collection is produced in Italy by the manufacturer of the Jean-Paul Gaultier, Alberta Ferretti and Moschino collections.

Rodriguez doesn't dwell on the heady company he keeps. "I was never looking for money or fame in my career," he says. "A lot of great things have happened to me that I'm very grateful for, but the most important thing is the passion that I feel for my work. I'm very tactile."

That's what drives me. I love working on each garment, and changing it 12 times. That's the moment when it all comes together for me."

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

The Star

Edited by Abdul Hamid Adasi

First Division Basketball Championship Jazireh remains on top after first round

By Abdul Hamid Adasi
Special to the star

After finishing round one of the First Division Basketball Championship, unbeaten Al Jazireh took the lead atop the standings and seemed confident of retaining the title for another season.

However, its last match against Al Ahli Thursday surprised everyone when their unprepared squad, which had lost to Al Orthodoxy 49-71, played good defence and provided high hopes that it would win the match after it finished the first half leading 36-33.

Al Jazireh was weak on offense—unusual for them—and this caused Al Ahli to play a slow game. The match was a good chance for Al Jazireh's You-

sif Abu Bakr and Al Ahli's Yousef Zagloul to compete from 3 point range.

Abu Bakr scored five successful 3 pointers, but Zagloul—the best player in the match—poured in six successful long-range shots, helping Al Ahli to take the lead. Although he scored 26 points, Zagloul missed three free throws in the crucial final seconds of the match, which helped lift Al Jazireh to victory, 75-69.

Al Ahli remained third after its second loss, and Al Orthodoxy second.

In other games, newcomers Al Jeel shocked fans when it won its matches with northern clubs Al Jaleel and Al Hussein—last in the league despite a couple of fine players from Amman—Mohammed Al Shalabi and

Moetassim Kulitshat.

The second round started Thursday. After it is over, the first three teams will play for the title and the remaining three will play to remain in the first division.

Stars of the league. The statistics given by the scouting committee showed the efficiency of players in the league and we noticed the following:

■ Al Ahli: Only Yousef Zagloul gave good results with his three point shots (6 successful attempts last match).

■ Al Jazireh: Yousef Abu Bakr with an average of 4-to-5 successful attempts per game from 3 point range.

■ Raed Gousheh (Al Jazireh): five assists in Al Orthodoxy match.

■ Hossam Lutfi, Ma'en Odeh and Naser Alawne (Al Jazireh): all 3 top scorers averaging 20 points per game, and all good rebounders.

■ Al Orthodoxy: Ashraf Samarah, top scorer.

■ Naser Bassam, good scorer, with 3 successful 3 point attempts, last game.

■ Fadi Al Saqqar: Five assists in Al Jazireh's match.

■ Ihab Mshah: all-around good play-maker.

■ Al Jeel: Kamel Al Hilo: 30 point per game average.

■ Al Hussein: Odeh, Alabam, Most consistent scorer on the team.

Team	P	W	L	St	St	Pts
Jazireh	5	5	0	425	300	10
Orthodoxy	5	4	1	435	293	9
Ahli	5	3	2	351	310	8
Jeel	5	2	3	295	407	7
Jaleel	5	1	4	270	347	6
Hussein	5	0	5	261	375	5

Big four turns into big one and surprise three

By Michael Dobie

THE BIG four, huh? That's what we all said, remember? This was the year the top four teams clearly had separated themselves from the rest of the pack, wasn't it? This was the year for the unprecedented: because the top four seeds had the best chance in a long time of advancing to the Final Four for the first time.

Don't try any revisionist history here. North Carolina, Duke, Arizona and Kansas were that good. OK, one could figure Kansas to fold prematurely at some point. There are some eternal verities, even in college basketball.

But only one of the quartet—North Carolina—will be taking a sight-seeing tour of the Alamogordo.

Which just goes to show why winning an NCAA championship, six games of one-and-done hell, is one of the most difficult feats in all of sports.

This tournament is tough. Utah coach Rick Majerus said.

"Big money. Big exposure. It's hard to play in this baby." Appropriately for this year's wild and wacky affair, two of the four Elite Eight games were won by lower seeds.

Kentucky with its come-from-behind blitz over Duke, and Utah in its absolute "sunner" over hubris-prone Arizona. Also appropriately, two of the four were tied to the end comebacks: Kentucky-Duke and Stanford-Rhode Island coach Jim Harrick, who remained ever-graceless in defeat by complaining the referees had "cut our heart out," and that Stanford had made "a couple of miracle shots." Good sportsmanship there. What we are left with is a surfeit of irony as we make our way to San Antonio.

Consider this: The best player in school history finishes his career, and then Utah reaches the Final Four.

The winningest coach in all of history retires, and then North Carolina makes the Final Four, again. One of the best point guards in the country graduates, and then Stanford reaches the Final Four. The most dynamic coach in the college game wanders off to the pros, and then Kentucky makes the Final Four, again. And that, not coincidentally, is one of the wonderful things about college basketball. Keith Van Horn, Dean Smith, Brevin Knight and Rick Pitino can leave the scene and the show goes on. Not only that, the game picks itself up, recharges itself and makes room for replacements Andre Miller, Bill Guthridge, Arthur Lee and Tubby Smith.

We also are left with a nursery rhyme, a Final Four with some things old, some new, some borrowed and some

coaches. Guthridge in his first year as a head coach and Smith in his first year at Kentucky. The borrowed: Kentucky sparkplug Heshimu Evans (from Manhattan), North Carolina's emotive Makhtar Ndiaye (from Wake Forest and Michigan) and Majerus' triangle-and-two defense (from any number of coaching influences, including Al McGuire and George Karl). The blue: The uniforms of Carolina and Kentucky and the checks of their cheerleaders (not to mention the uniforms and dispositions of players from Arizona, Duke, UConn and Rhode Island).

As usual, the college game's penultimate weekend presented a series of indelible images. There was Majerus, trying to swallow his emotions as he told of a pre-Arizona game good-luck phone call from Van Horn, and Majerus wincing while confessing his eagerness at having been unable to coach Van Horn to the Final Four. There was UConn's Richard Hamilton, lying on the floor in exhaustion and swayed up by his teammates after beating Washington with an impossible buzzer-beating shot, the 25th (or so it seemed) in this

after scoring the climactic basket against Rhode Island. Yeah, the tournament does strange things to people. It forces Duke players, seniors and freshmen alike, to launch an incredible series of bad shots down the stretch against Kentucky and call a record number of timeouts simply to avoid jump-ball situations. It makes Arizona's explosive triumvirate of Mike Bibby, Miles Simon and Michael Dickerson shoot a mind-boggling 6-for-36 against Utah. It inspires Utah's Miller to produce the most remarkable stat line in many a tournament: triple-double game highs of 18 points, 14 rebounds and 13 assists against Arizona. It makes Stanford's Lee eschew the obvious foul and make an impossible steal to beat Rhode Island.

"The Final Four," Montgomery mused afterward. "Who ever thought that would happen?" No question, the upsets were fun. But a nip-ticker might nag that there is a time and place for Cinderellas (jarring juxtaposition, isn't it—Majerus and Cinderella) and that place is early in the tournament, not the Final Four. When college basketball goes around to its last three games, one wants Arizona-North Carolina, right? Utah is a good story, but the Utes and the Tar Heels? Not quite the same. But that's the point, why they play the games. Because you never know.

So, what happens next? At this juncture, there is little sense in predicting anything. Sure, North Carolina looks better than ever.

But Majerus could have one more of what he called "a little wrinkle" up his sleeve. Stanford's front line could stomp its way to victory just like Santa Ana once did at the Alamogordo.

Or voracious Kentucky could continue to devour anything in its path (except Majerus; even Tubby's crew is not up to that).

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Parachuting in Jordan

NOW YOU can enjoy parachuting in Jordan. The Royal Jordanian Parachute Club (RJPC) offers a wide range of air activities.

Under the supervision of professional instructors, you can learn a variety of aeronautic sports that range from para-gliding and tandem parachuting to Sky Diving.

There are great activities to be expected. The RJPC includes activities like static line (round) parachuting, sky diving (free fall), tandem parachuting (dual-parachute), para-gliding, motor-paragliding, ultra-lights, free fall simulator (Airodium-Amman) and the fun obtained from advanced free fall training.

The RJPC is seeking to promote parachuting in Jordan, to create a national and international team to represent Jordan in various air sport events in the future and to provide Jordanian youth with the opportunity to practice air sports at prices that are significantly less than abroad.



Participants should be at least 16 years old, must pass a medical examination and abide by the rules and regulations of RJPC.

Halabi and Hamzeh challenge desert and win rally

THE ROYAL Automobile Club of Jordan kicked off the 1998 season with the 4x4 Desert Challenge Rally. Fifteen teams took part in the rally, with only five of them finishing off all the rally's stages.

The 250 kilometer rally wended its way through the Jordanian desert in the south-east regions of Amman, passing the Maslita Palace, then turned east toward Touba Palace. The final results were as follows:

1-Eissa Halabi and his assistant Zeid Hamzeh in Suzuki Vitara.

2-Ahmed Al Shorafa and his assistant Samer Hamad in Toyota Foregger.

3-Marwan Ibrahim and his assistant Ramez Hammodeh in Kia Motors.

4-Badie Darwazeh and his assistant Ahmad Tahar.

5-Othman Al Nashashibi and his assistant Tawfik Hakeun.

The winners will be awarded by the RACJ on 18 April along with the winners of the National Rally.

The rally was attended by Hassan Alaa El-Dein the RACJ director and Walid Mohlar the activities coordinator of the club.



Rozental may be out for Chile

GLASGOW, Scotland—Any hopes of playing in the World Cup appear to be over for injury-prone Chilean striker Sebastian Rozental of the Glasgow Rangers.

In a statement Monday, manager Walter Smith said the 21-year-old Rozental would need knee surgery for the third time in just over a year, thus ruling him out of the tournament.

"We have not set a date for Seb to go into hospital, but once he does he won't be able to play football until next season," Smith said. Rozental has had two operations on his left knee but Smith said this one was not related.

"One of the ligaments in his knee needs to be tightened. At the moment Seb can train and can also play, but he's feeling discomfort and this latest problem will have to be addressed sooner rather than later."

"It's a blow to us, to Seb and obviously to the Chilean national side. This is a major disaster for us." Rozental moved to Rangers just over a year ago on a \$6.5 million transfer but has played little. He made a comeback in the last month and has played a few league matches and exhibitions.



Same game, but new role for neo-Pele Ronaldo

MILAN, Italy—Put simply, Ronaldo is the most gifted footballer on the planet. But you don't have to take our word for it.

"He has everything," said Franz Beckenbauer, the legendary former German World Cup captain and coach. "He is perfect, he is fast, he is skilful, he can score goals. He is a wonderful player and it is great to watch him." And by watching him over the last couple of years, we've all been able to marvel at this extraordinary talent. He scored a remarkable 34 goals in 37 league games for Barcelona last season and inspired the side to Cup Winners' glory. Seeing reruns of his stunning scoring feats for the Catalan Giants is to understand why Internazionale of Milan paid a world record amount, close to \$30 million, to lure this Brazilian treasure to Italian shores. The man with golden feet has the golden boots to match. As his goals have flowed, so have player of the year honors on a continental and global scale, not to mention adulation from his illustrious peers. "He's phenomenal, very good qualities, very strong in front of goal. He finishes perfectly," said AC Milan striker George Weah.

Tottenham and German striker Juergen Klinsmann touted, "He did very well the last 2 years. He kind of exploded. He's a big, big talent and has everything you need." Dutch national team member Aron Winter likened him to another superstar. "He's like Maradona. They are born once every 10 years." But Ronaldo's not especially comfortable with the praise, or indeed the comparisons with the likes of Maradona and Pele. "Those types of comparisons are made by you the press and by other people," offered Ronaldo. "Of course, it's flattering to be compared to great figures of the history of soccer, but as far as I go I'm barely beginning and I still have a lot to do to get to the history books of soccer. I have to continue to get better every day. There are areas that I need to improve. I don't score many goals



and there are details like that where I can improve."

But what's this? A modest Ronaldo? A 21-year-old millionaire with the world, and his teammates, at his feet. A Milanese hero. A Brazilian icon. Dubbed and twice voted the best player on the planet. Surely he's cocky, brash, altogether wrapped up in his own self-importance. Don't you believe it!

"That's the amazing thing about Ronaldo," said Giammaria Visconti di Modrone, Inter Milan's vice president. "That's the first time I've seen such a big



MONDIAL NEWS

Vogts slams FIFA's 'Old Man' decision

STUTTGART, Germany—FIFA's efforts to protect players by banning the sliding tackle from behind and from the side were slammed by German coach Beni Vogts, who believes such tackles ought to remain a legitimate weapon for any defender.

Vogts said the move was one made by "old men out of touch" with the realities of the game. "It would have been nice if Mr. (Sepp) Blatter (FIFA general-secretary) and a few of the other guys who are over 70 had spoken beforehand with FIFA's technical commission," he said at a press conference.

FIFA plans to introduce the new rule at this year's World Cup in France, punishing all those who employ illegal sliding tackles with a red card. Vogts himself, known as "the Terrier" in his playing days with Borussia Monchengladbach, was a renowned employer of the maneuver, which helped him compensate his lack of height as a defender. To prepare his men for the new ruling, Vogts has invited Germany's only World Cup referee, Bernd Heynemann, to accompany the German squad on their 10-day training camp to Finland in May. "We have to respond to the changes and adapt," Vogts said. "It is important to find out first hand how the referees are going to judge tackles from now on."



Vogts

Bora backs Nigeria for title

MILAN, Italy—Taking his fourth different nation to the World Cup, Bora Milutinovic believes his latest, Nigeria, can win the title. "This is the strongest national team I've ever had at my disposal," said the 53-year-old Yugoslav, who also has been in charge of Mexico (1986), Costa Rica (1990) and the United States (1994). "Everything is possible, including dreaming about the title. Why not?" Milutinovic said. He was in Milan Sunday to see defender Taribo West and forward Nwankwo Kanu play for Inter Milan against rival AC Milan in a key Serie A match.

Rio hopes for England recall

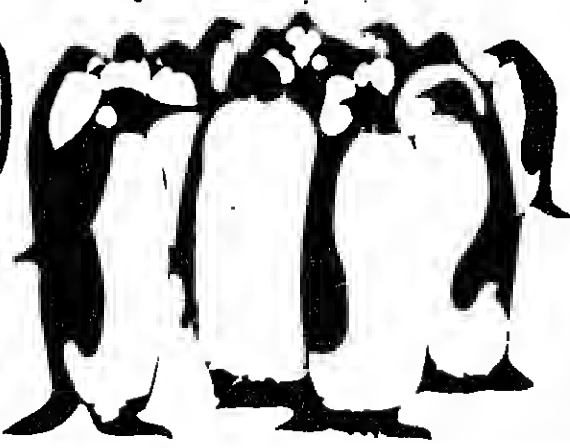
LONDON—Rio Ferdinand hopes that his recent standout performances for West Ham against Arsenal's Dutch star, Dennis Bergkamp, might help him regain his place on the England team. The 19-year-old center-back allowed Bergkamp few chances in the two cup games between the teams even though the Gunners beat the Hammers in a penalty shoot-out. "He is someone you are always looking over your shoulder to see where he is. He's got so much class about him and an aura about him," Ferdinand said of the Dutchman. "But I felt we did a good job against him at Highbury and in the replay at Upton Park before he was red-carded. It's good to play quality players and you can gauge yourself and how well you are progressing," said Ferdinand.

No deal on EU tickets

BRUSSELS—The European Commission said that the French organizers of this year's World Cup soccer tournament had refused to make all remaining tickets for the finals available outside France.

The Commission said it would immediately take formal proceedings against the French organizing committee (CFO) which could lead to a fine of up to 10 percent of revenues from World Cup ticket sales.



ROUND
OWN

Ya Hala goes to Switzerland

Hotel InterContinental's Folklore Troupe, "Ya Hala" left in Switzerland to participate in the CSI Horse Show taking place in Zurich. Ya Hala is presenting Jordanian Folklore Dances that aims to take Swiss audiences through Jordanian history and culture. The 26-person Troupe are all staff members of the InterContinental. The management of the Hotel is pleased to participate in this large event which it considers as a good way of promoting Jordan in the Swiss tourism market.



Deserts, plains ground modernity in tradition

By Kofi Allah
Special to the Star

Jordanian artists, developing quickly and becoming more sophisticated in so many ways, have a tendency to lag behind when it comes to one key element—getting their message across.

In this, Youssef Salem Ahmed Al Baddawi is an advance of practically everyone. He has developed a unique way of expressing himself and his world on canvas. He not only draws on his legacy as a Jordanian and an Arab, dwelling on solely Arab-Islamic cultural history; he reveals his country's history as a vast cultural melting pot as well.

Al Baddawi's exhibition as a whole preserves a rich cultural heritage anchored in traditions dating back many centuries while at the same time providing a tantalizing modernity. The types and aspirations that are projected through his paintings' color and style are what makes them, at once, both traditional and epoch-embracing.

Fourteen of his art works are on view at Darat Al Funun. They comprise one of the most exciting and moving exhibitions I have ever seen. The exhibition presents a vivid picture of the traditional, spiritual and cultural aspects of the medieval and contemporary Jordanian Arab community. Dredging both his personal and collective selves, Baddawi has brought forth works of striking originality and emotional complexity that will captivate and richly reward the attention of the viewer.

Born in Amman in 1959, he graduated with distinction from the Institute of Fine Arts in 1979. He initially worked in the fields of fashion design, journalism and teaching. Currently he works as an instructor. His broad and wide experience are reflected in his canvases.

His previous solo and group exhibitions include the 1979 Ministry of Culture and Youth exhibition of Amman, the 1985 Watercolors Exhibition at the Alfar Art Gallery, Amman; his



group exhibitions include, among others, the Jordanian Artists Exhibition at the Cultural Palace, Amman, 1977; The Turkish Exhibition, Istanbul, Turkey 1983; The Spanish-Arab Cultural Association Exhibition, Madrid, Spain 1995. He has won several awards, notably, 'The

Royal Coronation Festival, Amman, 1981 and one of the the Picasso and Miro Art Competitions of the Spanish Cultural Center in Amman in 1986.

One of the more noticeable aspects of Baddawi's paintings is the essential role folklore

plays. He recreates the art you find in villages and rural areas throughout Jordan and the Arab world. In one 180 x 115 centimeters painting three men in traditional Arab dress are seen sitting down on the bare ground as the wind from the desert blows around them. Another depicts a group of three veiled women. The richness of color and movement swirling around them seems, in the picture, to have come about as the conclusion to some reassuring story.

Most of the pictures suggest a rich Arab heritage in which the desert and plains are the principal setting. One particularly clear example shows a number of Bedouins in their native environment; in another, against a similar background, men play traditional stone games in the sand.

Baddawi feels that desert and plains landscapes, central to so many of his works, are the undeniable identity of the Arabs and help define their cultural heritage. Desert backgrounds also work to link and unify the different styles of his work.

Traditional as his world at first seems, he can also paint a contemporary young man in a setting that communicates a feeling of modernization, the youth portrayed as heading hopefully toward the future.

Indeed, Baddawi's various styles reveal an unusual deftness involving interpretation and meaning and the ability to render these through a variety of techniques. He can move, for example, from placing the intensely serene face of a black woman against a background connoting confusion, dismay and disappointment to depicting another woman dressed in white, both her figure and her setting full of confidence and triumph.

The variety of contexts in which traditional themes are placed, and Baddawi's consistently different interpretations of these, recommend this gathering as one that will appeal to any taste. The exhibition continues until 9 April 1998 at the Abdul Hammed Shoman Foundation, Darat Al Funun, Jubal al Weibdeh, Amman. ■

Saddest, funniest, most lovable of authors

Master novelist makes mundane marvelous

By Natasha Twal
Special to the Star

One of the Czech Republic's most articulate authors, Milan Kundera, celebrates his 60th birthday next week. Creator of a widely varied oeuvre, he is a widely varied author. Kundera is considered to be among the saddest, funniest and most lovable of authors. He is a virtuoso who is intelligent, both speculative and playful. His intellectual panache, as well as his endless ability to generate original ideas from the most archetypal—almost mundane—human situations makes him a never less than stimulating.

Born 1 April, 1929 in Brno, former Czechoslovakia, Kundera was a jazz musician in his youth. He was a communist party member twice, from 1945-1954 and 1956-1960. He was expelled from the party both times, for heterodox opinions. These political forces affected his employment in the film faculty of the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts in Prague, where he taught until 1969. At that time, he was fired and his works proscribed from legal publication within the borders of Czechoslovakia.

In response to these restrictions, Kundera emigrated to France in 1975, where he taught at The University of Rennes from 1975 to 1978. He now lives in Paris with his wife, Vera Holanikova.

The first novel *Zer* (The Joke) was first published in Czech in 1965. It was followed by *The Laughable Loves*, *Life is Elsewhere*, *The Farewell Party*, *The Book of Laughter*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *Immortality* and finally *Slowness*, published in 1994.



the most critical and popular attention is *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. It was published in 1984 and left a tremendous impact on the history of contemporary literature.

This veritable masterpiece is what we could characterize as being philosophical without being tedious, a love story without the typically nauseating happy-ever-after, a sex manual without being rated. The two main protagonists are Tomas and Tereza, husband and wife. Tomas is the chronic irresponsible womanizer and Tereza is the insecure idealistic live of his life. The novel traces the history, the pain and the happiness of the couple and their acquaintances through the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia, in a world in which lives are

shaped by irrevocable choices and fortuitous events, a world in which everything occurs but once, and where existence often seems to lose its substance, its real weight.

An adaptation of the novel was made into a movie, directed by Philip Kaufman in 1988, with Daniel Day-Lewis playing the role of the womanizing Tomas and Julie Binoche as Tereza, his devoted, passionate yet often-perplexed wife.

Both the book and the film version deal with the nature of intimacy and its relationship to sexuality. Tomas' womanizing brings an added appreciation of Tereza's devotion to their relationship, while her allowance of his adulterous flings brings her to the humor necessary to finally withstand and not be threatened by them.

Kundera's latest novel—and hopefully not his last—is *Le Lenteur* (Slowness) which was originally written in French. Its structure is based on music-like themes that are introduced and developed with much restraint, recasting Kundera's hallmark "lightness" as an interplay of each incident-per-minute, much like the movements in dance.

The author and his wife, driving, stop at a chateau for the night. A motorcycle he has glimpsed in his rear view mirror, an imagined 18th century French novel of amorous intrigue, and his insouciant thoughts all combine, using the winding halls of the chateau, along with the past and present, as the setting for mostly banal meditations on love and time. The story doesn't really go anywhere, it's just a narrative of an aging, privileged man shaking his fist at the next generation rising in from the outside and passing him by.

Kundera's contribution to the world of literature is not confined to his eight epigrammatic novels; he is also a poet, a script writer and an essayist. His essays include *The Art of the Novel* (1961) and *Testaments Betwixt* (1995).

He has successfully published three plays: *The Owners of the Keys* (1962), *The Bluebeard* (1969), and *Imagines and His Master* (1981). Finally, his contribution to the world of poetry includes *A Broad Garden* (1953), *The Last May* (1955), and *Monologues* (1957).

Few contemporary writers have succeeded as Kundera has in creating a world that is, at once, philosophical, erotic, spiritual, outrageously funny and yet for all this commonness, so uncommonly profound. ■



Forte Grand becomes Le Meridien

ON 21 March 1998 Forte Grand Amman became Le Meridien Amman. Under the auspices of Aqel Biltaji, tourism minister, Zuhair Khoury, chairman of the Housing Bank and Peter Cudnell Managing Director of Le Meridien Middle East and West Asia held a reception celebrating the launch of the Le Meridien Hotel in Amman.

Since the acquisition of Le Meridien by Forte Hotel in 1994, the company itself acquired by Granada Plc, in 1996, has been undergoing radical change. The decision was made early on that the Le Meridien name would become the brand of Forte's international chain of 4 and 5 Star Deluxe hotels. Currently numbering 101 hotels on all 5 continents the company plans to double this within 5 years. Existing Forte Grand and other hotels in the group have been rebranding to Meridien at a steady pace during the past year.

Becoming a Le Meridien is not just a case of changing the name and the sign. Le Meridien, originally part of Air France, is destined to retain its French origins even though they are British owned—Le Meridien, is set apart from standard hotel chains by its brand philosophy: It promises its customers "La Difference" a hotel experience which embodies a number of key elements unique to the Meridien brand. These are European style with a genuine respect for local culture and customs care and attention to every detail and innovative practices and developments.

1998 will see major redevelopments for Le Meridien Amman. Plans are underway to re-scheme 4 of the hotel's restaurants, re-design the entrance and lobby, refurbish all guest rooms and to create a multipurpose function hall. Staff development and training are a fundamental part of the cultural change Forte Grand Amman will experience. ■

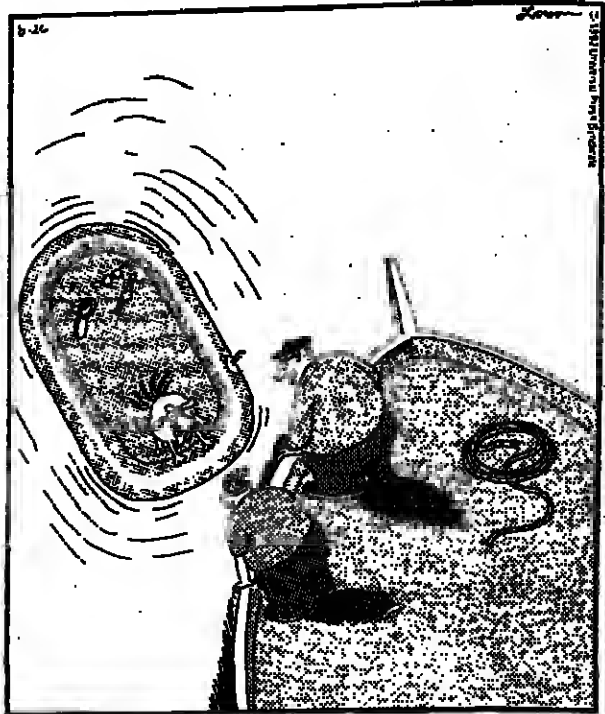
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Jordan's political, economic
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THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON



"Hey, boy! How ya doin'? ... Look at him, Dan. Poor guy's been floating out here for days but he's still just as fat and happy as ever."



Things from Ipanema



AGENDA

Amman International
Theater Festival
Schedule for 3/28-4/2

At Main Theater, 9 pm
March 28-Spinning Lives,
performed by El Warsha
(Egypt)
March 29/30-100 mobiles a
part 1, by ALIS (France)
March 31/April 1-The
Daughters of Bernadette
Alba, Shrapnel Theater
Company (Egypt)
April 2-Khal Do (India)

At Round Theater,
7:30 pm
March 28/29-Ramayana,
Wayang Kulit Theater (In-
donesia)
March 30/31-Habil & Ha-
bil, Tein Sinan Theater (Al-
geria)
April 1/2-Another Bullet At
Bernadette Alba's House, Al
Fawanees (Jordan)

At Al Mashini Theater,
6 pm
March 29-I'm Thinking Of
You (a dramatic reading)
March 30-Al Mutashael,
Al Qasaba (Palestine)

At Abila School, 11 am
March 28-A Roaming of
Self, Abila School (Jordan)

Irbid, 8:30 pm
March 31-Walaw, Al Faw-
anees Theater (Jordan)
April 1-Bridge to Eternity,
Theater Day (Palestine)

Admission to all perfor-
mances, JD 4.
For further details on times
and locations, please tele-
phone 5624413.

Films
■ Upcoming at the French
Cultural Center, a Luis Bu-
nuel film festival, begin-
ning 6 April with *La Fiebre*
a El Pao and continuing
with *Le charme discret de*
la bourgeoisie on 13 April;
Le fantome de la liberte on
20 April; and closing with
Cet obscur objet du desir
on 27 April. All showings
at 6:30 and 8:30 pm at the
French Cultural Center, Ja-
hal Weibdeh.

Exhibitions
■ "Colors of Life"—Nature
photography
at Books@Cafe (tel. 837931/
2) through 31 March.
■ Works by the late Iraqi
artist Seddiq Ahmad can
be seen at Hammurabi Gal-
lery (Gardens Street, tel.
5695027) till 29 March.

Lectures
■ "Orientalism and Post
Modernism" by PhD candi-
date Paul Heck, 2 April,
Fulbright House, Shmeisa-
ni, at 4 pm. Sponsored by
the American Language
Center.

The Star's GUIDE

Programs on JTV
from 28 March-3 April

ENGLISH PROGRAMS

SATURDAY
4:00—Holy Koran
4:10—The Hammerman
4:30—French Program
5:00—Canon The Adventurer
6:00—Square One
6:30—Neighbors
7:00—News in French
7:15—Discovery Magazine
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—You Bet Your Life
8:00—Cinema, Cinema
8:30—Prison
9:10—Sirens
10:00—News At Ten
10:30—Feature Film
12:00—Are You Being Served?

SUNDAY
4:00—Holy Koran
4:10—Cartoon
4:30—French Program
6:00—Skippy
7:00—News in French
7:15—A Tour in France
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—America's Funniest
8:00—People and Places in Africa
8:30—Killing for a Living
9:10—Renegade
10:00—News At Ten
10:30—North and South
11:10—The Upper Hand

MONDAY
4:00—Holy Koran
4:10—Cartoon
4:30—French Program
6:00—Riding High
6:30—Neighbors
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Programs
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Hope And Gloria
8:00—Perspective
8:30—American Chart Show
9:10—Marker
10:00—News At Ten
10:30—Law & Order



American Chart Show, Monday at 8:30

TUESDAY
4:00—Holy Koran
4:10—CRO
4:30—French Program
6:00—Small Talk
6:30—Border Town
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Programs
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Pride and Joy
8:00—What Would You Do

8:30—Encounter
9:10—Acapulco Bay
10:00—News At Ten
10:30—Feature Film: *She's Not There*, starring: Connie Selleca and Patricia Clarkson
12:00—Metro Café

WEDNESDAY
4:00—Holy Koran
4:10—Mr. Boggs
4:30—French Programs
6:00—Oliver Twist
6:30—Neighbors

Amman cinemas

- Philadelphia I (Tel: 4634149): Pierce Brosnan & Linda Hamilton in "Dante's Peak"
- Philadelphia II (Tel: 4634149): Val Kilmer & Elizabeth Shue in "The Saint"
- Galleria I (Tel: 079 33430): Titanic
- Galleria II (Tel: 079 33430): Titanic
- Plaza (Tel: 5699238): Titanic
- Concord I (Tel: 5677420): Risala Ila Al Wali (Arabic)
- Concord II (Tel: 5677420): Long Kiss Goodnight

7:00—News in French
7:15—French Programs
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Campus Cops
8:00—The Health Show
8:30—Timewatch
9:10—Kung Fu
10:00—News At Ten
10:30—Women on the Run

THURSDAY
2:00—Holy Koran
2:10—The Dinky Di's
2:30—The Animal Show
3:00—French Programs
5:00—NBA
6:00—The Burned Bridge
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Programs
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Big Brother Jake
8:00—Great Romance
8:30—Lois & Clark
9:10—Dr. Quinn The Medicine Woman
9:30—The Oprah Winfrey Show
10:00—News At Ten
10:30—Feature Film
12:00—Never the Twain

FRIDAY
2:00—Holy Koran
2:10—Teddy Ruxpin
2:30—Wishbone
3:00—French Programs
5:00—He Shoots, He Scores
5:30—Blue Water Dreaming
6:00—Tuesdays
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Program
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—F.R.I.E.N.D.S.
8:00—Life on the Internet
8:30—The Album Show
9:10—Adventures of Brisco County
10:00—News At Ten
10:30—Drama
12:00—Almost Home

PROGRAMMES EN FRANÇAIS

SAMEDI
16:30—Arsène Lupin
17:00—Cajon
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Magazine
L'œuf de Colomb

DIMANCHE
16:30—Les plus petits
17:00—Magazine
Faut pas rêver
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Le Tour de France

LUNDI
16:30—Un bon petit diable
17:00—Thalassie
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Magazine scientifique
Cinq sur cinq

MARDI
16:30—Un bon petit diable
17:00—Savoir plus santé
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—De cause à effet

MERCREDI
16:30—Un bon petit diable
17:00—Ushuaia
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—E-M6

JEUDI
15:00—Qui est qui
15:30—Sous vos applaudissements
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Atomes crochus

VENREDI
15:00—Qui est qui
15:30—Julie Lescaut
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Allô la Terre

Programs are subject to change by JTV

MOVIE

Iron Mask Musketeers too rusty to move

By Rita Kempley

THE THREE Musketeers, a rusty trio of middle-aged retirees, have all but changed their motto from "All for one and one for all" to "I have fallen and I can't get up" in this less-than-rollicking adaptation of "The Man in the Iron Mask." But, like the finest of French bordelais, the graying comrades have acquired richer, more complex characters with age.

Still, they're not the Devil-may-care swash-bucklers they once were, and their nostalgia for their youthful prowess and bygone glory days colors this flat retelling of Alexandre Dumas' tale. When Athos (John Malkovich), Porthos (Jeremy Irons) and Aramis (Leonardo DiCaprio), an imperious priss-pot who replaced the noble ruler the heroes gallantly served as members of the King's Royal Guards.

DiCaprio, straight from his rollicking pauper's role in "Titanic," doesn't make much of a lecherous tyrant. (For that, see Billy Zane.) DiCaprio is very much the callow snob, but he's still wet behind the ears when it comes to conveying monstrous cruelty. With his lust for women and fancy threads, the teen king seems to need a trip to Paris, all right, Paris Island.

DiCaprio is far more comfortable when playing the pure-hearted, right-thinking Philippe, the king's twin brother. Reared without knowing his true identity, Philippe has had access to less than nothing. Yet he has emerged from poverty and imprisonment the most compassionate of men and becomes the key to changing French history.

Randall Wallace, the Oscar-nominated writer of "Braveheart," makes his directorial debut with this tame reworking of Dumas' novel. The themes and values of the piece are similar, but they're presented without the

zealousness Mel Gibson brought to the brawny kilt drama. The yarn does get off to a pants-splining start, though, thanks to Porthos, who demonstrates conclusively that there was no Beano in the 17th century.

The boisterous, big-bellied old sot has spent his early retirement in the pursuit of wine and women. But neither has replaced the camaraderie he shared with Aramis, now a Jesuit brother, and Athos, who has devoted himself to rearing his son, Raoul (Peter Sarsgaard). Though neither seems to have missed the glory days so much as Porthos, Louis' villainy gradually forces the trio back into the fray.

The already unfocused story becomes downright soap-opera with the addition of the woes of D'Artagnan (introspective Gabriel Byrne). An old friend who is now the head of the Royal Guard, D'Artagnan remains boneheaded loyal to the brai king for reasons the Musketeers can't fathom. Hmm. Could it have something to do with the lidded glances he shares with the queen mother (Anne Parillaud)?

Chicancy among the courtiers, the king's insistent pursuit of Raoul's fiancée (Judith Godrèche), Porthos' suicide attempts: "The Man in the Iron Mask" doesn't lack for complications but for swordplay. Aside from a climactic clash between the heroes and the Royal Guard, the cutlery pretty much stays on the table.

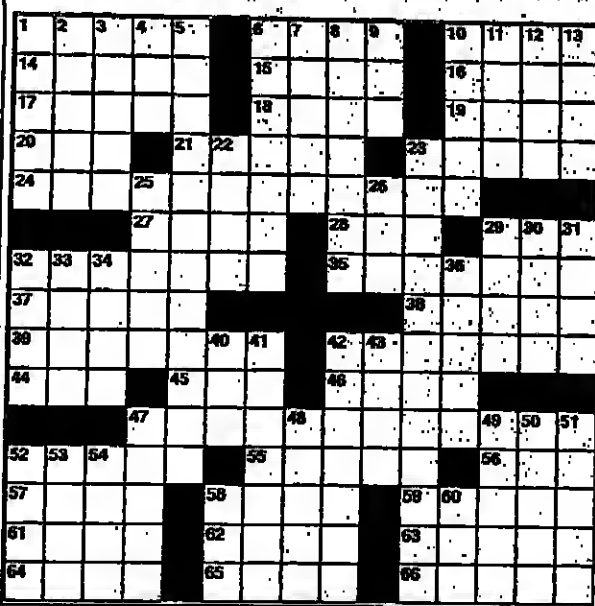
Writer-director Wallace seems more interested in the inner Musketeer, how each carries the weight of the years or adjusts to loss and disappointment. The actors, especially Byrne and Malkovich, can sag with the resignation of middle age when need be, but they are clearly itching to play with their swords. Fat chance. These boomers in bloomers and plumed hats spend more time parrying their own foibles than the tyrant's foils.

La Times-Washington Post News Service



Leonardo DiCaprio

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS
1 San Antonio mission
6 Fills with reverence
10 Cylinder
14 Landed estate
15 Area
16 Again
17 Organic compound
18 Medieval chest
19 Citrus fruit
20 Pro
21 Meat
23 Snuggles
24 Coeur d'Alene bluffs
27 Early
28 Peruvian
29 Captured GI
32 According to Gardner's preference?
35 Derby
37 Star
38 Ms. Dunne (Tennyeon)
42 Like flowers
44 Postcard's place
45 Charged particle
46 Corn units
47 Memphis test-toter?
52 Relish
55 Playwright
56 Paragon
57 Substrate
58 Sad notice
59 Drawing room
61 Part
62 Insect
63 Olfactory
64 out (made 33)
65 Tracy's love

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-This Week's- HOROSCOPES

By Linda Black

Weekly Tip: The sun is in Pisces, making it a little difficult for most people to concentrate.

Aries (March 21-April 19). You'll be even more outrageous than usual. Work as much as possible, even though your social life is quite active.

Taurus (April 20-May 20). With the moon in your sign and the sun in Pisces, you can be just about whatever you want.

Gemini (May 21-June 21). Part of your lesson while the sun's in Pisces is to learn to get along with authority figures. Don't argue with a bureaucrat, you'll get absolutely nowhere.

Cancer (June 22-July 22). Meet with friends and make important decisions regarding money. You'll negotiate the best deals.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22). Don't argue with a boss. It's a complete waste of time, especially if the boss is wrong.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). You're looking very good, especially to an attractive foreigner. Don't flirt at work, however. The boss won't miss a thing.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Save up as much as possible. A great opportunity may arrive having to do with travel and education.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). You're lucky in love. A disruption has a happy ending. Talk things over with your sweetheart and take action. Be careful with money.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). If you can give a domestic project your full attention, there's a good chance you'll get it finished.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Listen to a loved one's advice about how to spend your money. You'll save a lot and also strengthen that bond.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). A discussion with a friend moves slowly, but that's OK. You're getting a much better understanding of each other.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20). A woman who's after you to do something will increase the pressure. If it has to do with a household matter, take care of it.

If You're Having a Birthday This Week: You're even smarter than usual. You're strong, decisive, forthright and lucky. Learn to trust your hunches and your own good judgment by relying on both of them more.

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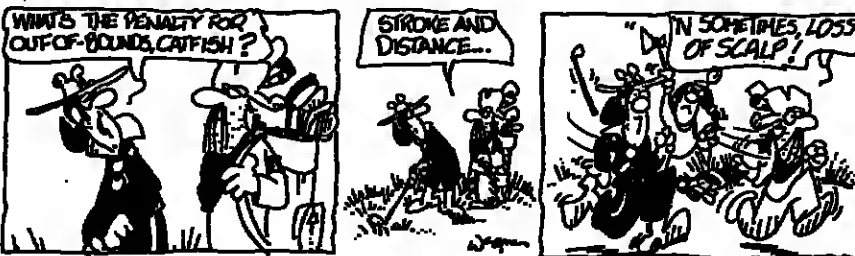
PERKY & BEANZ by Russell Myers



ELWOOD by Ben Templeton & Tom Forman



CATFISH by Fred Wagner & Tom Cone



Jumble

Unscramble these four words, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

MILOB
OTTOH
RUNEPI
DEEBIS

Answer: M I L O B A T A

Answer: L I M B O T O O T H P E N U R Y B E S I D E

Would You Believe...

Gerald Ford was the only man to serve as both U.S. vice president and president without ever having been elected to either office.

Chinese astronomers first recorded their observations of what became known as Halley's Comet in 240 B.C.

President Franklin Roosevelt contracted polio rather late in life. He was 39 years old when he was struck by the disease.

The British Navy regularly issued a "rum ration" to its sailors for 239 years before the practice was halted.

John Quincy Adams was the only son of a president to become a president as well.

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"... Oh—you didn't know that Peerless Machine Tool had a truant officer? Well, you know it now!"
1998, Tribune Media Services

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Le Jourdain

Supplément en français du Star

Les jardins royaux, symboles de puissance par Véronique Abu-Nijm

Des jardins qui agrémentaient la vie des rois ammonites, nous ne savons rien au juste. Le seul témoignage de leur existence est une inscription du VIII^{ème} siècle av. J.C. provenant de Tell-Sir, le site de l'Université de Jordanie. Elle atteste l'aménagement d'un parc en ces termes : «Travaux d'Amminadab, roi des Ammonites (...) la vigne, les jardins, la canalisation et les citernes». Il est possible que ces jardins aient eu le même emplacement que la station moderne d'agriculture qui jouxte le campus universitaire, puisque ces installations occupent un site dont les vestiges les plus anciens datent d'environ 900 av. J.C. Mais plus, on ne saurait dire. Cependant, on peut s'attarder un instant sur la tradition orientale des jardins royaux, qui étaient non seulement des lieux de délectation pour les souverains mais aussi l'expression de leur puissance. Les meilleurs documents proviennent des palais assyriens (ci-contre, détail d'un bas-relief provenant de Ninive, VII^{ème} siècle av. J.C.) qui ont conservé des bas-reliefs et une littérature détaillée. Ces jardins se signalaient par

leur exubérance et leur richesse. Au sein de contrées arides, leur opulence est le signe de la bienveillance divine qui agrée le règne du souverain. Celui-ci se plaît à y rassembler une grande diversité végétale, des espèces régionales comme des plantes collectées au cours de campagnes militaires, satisfaisant ainsi son goût de l'exotisme en même temps que le plaisir de voir prospérer au pied de son palais des plantes provenant de pays vaincus. Ces espaces étant peuplés d'animaux domestiques et sauvages, le roi s'y adonne à une chasse aussi divertissante que symbolique et affirme par là-même sa maîtrise sur le monde vivant. Vu leur forte connotation politique, les parcs royaux sont, en temps de guerre, sacrifiés jusqu'à destruction. Les jardins d'Ammon n'ont certes pas connu l'ampleur des jardins d'Assyrie, Ammon étant un État sans grande envergure. Mais ils s'inscrivent dans cette tradition qui a laissé des traces dans la littérature orientale des bords de la Méditerranée aux confins de la Mésopotamie. ■



Société

L'honneur, au-dessus de tout soupçon

Ce principe traditionnel est l'un des fondements précieux des sociétés arabes et méditerranéennes en général. En Jordanie, les crimes qui y sont liés ne sont plus tabous. Les journaux en parlent, des colloques leur sont consacrés. Mais les mentalités ont du mal à évoluer.

Enquête sur une valeur indéfectible.

«Le premier cas de crime d'honneur que j'ai connu personnellement concernait une fille de 16 ans, qui était en réalité innocente», raconte Nadia Shamrouh, vice-présidente de l'Union des femmes jordanaises. Elle a été tuée par son frère parce que quelqu'un l'avait vue avec un homme dans la rue : c'était une fille si belle...

Peut-être plus dramatique encore car raconté par l'une des rares victimes ayant survécu à une tentative de crime d'honneur, ce récit d'un véritable calvaire : enfermée depuis plusieurs mois dans une chambre chez ses parents, la jeune femme a réussi à appeler l'Union au secours grâce à un numéro de téléphone trouvé par hasard dans un journal qui lui servait de plateau-repas. Des assistantes sociales sont alors venues lui rendre visite. Un affront public insupportable pour le père qui décida de tuer sa fille mais ne parvint finalement qu'à la blesser...

La presse, aujourd'hui, n'hésite plus à dévoiler ces affaires tragiques qui montrent que l'honneur, valeur fortement ancrée dans la mentalité jordanienne, vaut parfois plus que la vie d'une femme. Selon les rapports officiels de la police, entre 25 et 30 femmes sont sacrifiées chaque année sur l'autel de l'honneur familial. Les chercheurs et juristes concernés estiment leur nombre réel, supérieur à ces statistiques officielles. Beaucoup de meurtres sont en effet dissimulés en suicide ou en accident.

Si précieux mais si vulnérable, l'honneur est un souci permanent. Le poison des mauvaises langues se répand dans tout un quartier comme un feu de brousse, si telle ou telle fille s'est anarée dans la rue en compagnie d'un garçon, ou bien si une femme mariée a échangé un regard ou un geste avec un autre homme. Une fois la réputation entachée, les preuves ou les degrés de culpabilité ne comptent plus. Certains disent

alors qu'il n'y a jamais de l'humaine sans feu. D'autres qu'il est du devoir de la femme de se «protéger» contre tout commémoriaire. Nombreuses sont donc celles qui considèrent le voile comme une forme de «protection» pas seulement contre les regards des hommes, constate Nadia Shamrouh, mais aussi contre les commémoriaires des voisins.

Crime collectif

S'il en faut peu pour se faire accuser de comportement immoral, cela dépend aussi de la sévérité de chaque famille : par grave atteinte à l'honneur, certaines comprennent l'adultère éprouvé, perte de la virginité avant le mariage ou grossesse illégitime, d'autres se contentent d'un simple comportement qui pourrait conduire tôt ou tard à une relation illégitime. Selon les investigations de la police sur les crimes d'honneur rapportés ces dernières années, 95% des meurtres ont été perpétrés sur la seule base d'une



«Une fille ne vient pas au monde pour elle-même mais pour sa famille qui aura droit de vie et de mort sur elle». Une avocate à l'Union des femmes jordanaises.

suspicion, d'une rumeur ou par vengeance», précise Hussein Sarhan, le directeur du nouveau Centre de protection familiale

du Département de la sécurité publique. «Les rapports des médecins légistes montrent que la majorité des jeunes victimes étaient encore vierges», ajoute-t-il.

Pratique commune aux cultures arabes et méditerranéennes, les crimes d'honneur représentent un phénomène plus étendu en Arabie Saoudite, dans le nord de l'Égypte et au Yémen qu'en Syrie, au Liban, en Irak et en Afrique du nord, estime Hussein Sarhan malgré l'absence de statistiques fiables. En Jordanie, la situation, est semblable à celle de la Palestine, même si le phénomène est plus important dans la région de Gaza. «C'est un problème réel, mais le fait qu'aujourd'hui on en parle davantage ne signifie pas que le nombre de ces crimes ait augmenté», souligne-t-il. Ils ont toujours existé surtout à l'époque précédant la création de l'État jordanien. Comme il n'y avait pas encore de droit applicable, les gens étaient obligés de faire respecter leur propre loi.

Contrairement aux homicides individuels, les crimes commis au nom de l'honneur sont des actes d'inspiration collective qui se produisent à l'intérieur d'une même famille.

La décision de la famille entière est traduite en acte dans la plupart des cas par un des frères de la victime, parfois par le mari ou le père, et plus rarement par le fils. «Manipulé par la volonté de sa famille, le criminel juvénile devient souvent victime lui-même, explique Nadia Shamrouh, et quand ce n'est pas le tueur, c'est un témoin faible de la famille (éventuellement un tueur musulman à la réputation douteuse), qui est prêt à l'utiliser».

Sharaf et ird

De toute façon, le criminel d'honneur n'y perd pas sa dignité. «Ce qui ne dépasse c'est le fait que le criminel soit reçu comme un héros à la police. Les policiers le traitent avec beaucoup de respect et de considération, comme s'il avait fait quelque chose dont il pouvait être fier», s'exclame Mona Zughbaba, juriste à l'Union des femmes jordanaises. Ce ne manque pas de faire respecter, dans la mentalité des gens, une fille ne vient pas au monde pour elle-même mais pour sa famille, qui aura droit de vie et de mort sur elle». Dès la naissance, une fille est regardée moins comme un enfant que

comme une source potentielle de soucis d'argent et surtout d'honneur. «La fille est plus un symbole de l'honneur qu'un être humain», résume l'avocate. Comme dans n'importe quelle société patriarcale, le comportement honorable de la femme est la garantie de la paternité de l'homme. Sur sa descendance, explique Mohammad Al-Ali, vice-doyen de la faculté de droit musulman à l'Université du Yarmouk. Pour assurer la transmission honorable de son nom (sharaf, honneur ou sans de noblesse), le protecteur de la famille doit veiller sur l'honneur de la femme (ird au sens de dignité sexuelle) qu'il a choisie pour être la mère de ses enfants. «Aussi, on est bien sévère en matière d'ird», admet le professeur d'origine égyptienne.

«Même si les termes sharaf et ird ne sont pas mentionnés dans le Coran ou la Sunna, le sens de ces notions pré-islamiques est tout de même présent dans les textes religieux», précise-t-il.

Ces concepts datent de l'époque d'un droit coutumier tribal et inflexible. La loi de l'islam s'en est écartée largement mais certains atavismes resurgissent encore de temps

en temps au nom de la défense de l'honneur.

L'enterrement vivant de bébés-filles immédiatement après l'accouchement relève de rites légendaires. Pourtant le premier crime d'honneur rapporté cette année en Jordanie a eu pour victime une petite fille d'une semaine. Née seulement trois mois après le mariage de ses parents, elle a été enterrée vivante par son père qui voulait laver son honneur. «Laisser dériver le cordon ombilical d'une nouvelle-née est une pratique qui arrive encore, mais qui est facilement repoussée si l'accouchement a lieu à la maison», assure Dr. Al-Ali, qui a enseigné également en France et dans le Golfe.

«Le fait est qu'en matière d'honneur, les traditions s'imposent aux règles religieuses et au droit positif, analyse-t-il, dans 90% des cas, les gens ne vont pas au tribunal, ils règlent les choses chez eux, ce qui rend la situation des femmes très difficile». D'un autre côté, le professeur admet que l'honneur est une des principales qualités morales qui font la différence entre un homme et un animal. ■

Anca de Maio

Le code pénal toujours du côté des hommes

Au regard des peines infligées pour crimes d'honneur, la loi du royaume, selon Mona Zughbaba, avocate à l'Union des femmes jordanaises, se révèle permissive pour les hommes.

Même si l'article concernant le meurtre en général (art. 67) ne reconnaît pas de circonstances atténuantes, les sanctions lourdes prévues normalement (peine capitale pour assassinat, 25 ans de travaux forcés pour meurtre, 15 ans pour homicide involontaire) ne s'appliquent pas aux cas liés à la notion d'honneur, précise la jeune femme.

Dans l'article 340, l'alinéa premier annule la sanction et excuse entièrement l'homme qui «surprend sa femme ou une de ses maharim» (c'est-à-dire les femmes avec lesquelles les relations sexuelles sont interdites : mère, grand-mère, fille, petite-fille, sœur ou tante du côté paternel) en train de commettre l'adultère, et qui tue, blesse ou porte préjudice à l'une des deux personnes ou aux deux. «En revanche, ajoute l'avocate, la femme qui surprend et tue son mari dans une situation similaire aura à subir tout le poids de la loi».

Le deuxième alinéa du même article prévoit ensuite une réduction de peine pour celui qui trouve sa femme, ou une des femmes de sa proche famille, dans une situation adultérine. Une expression floue à souhait, selon la juriste, autorise de multiples interprétations. Ainsi des meurtres perpétrés sur la seule base de la présomption entrent souvent dans le cadre de cet alinéa indulgent.

La légitime défense (art. 341) et l'état de fureur (art.98) peuvent aussi être invoqués : on dit alors que l'agresseur a tué pour

défendre son honneur ou sous le coup de la colère en raison du comportement de sa femme. Enfin, les diminutions de peines de moitié sont fréquentes quand la famille de la victime abandonne sa plainte et pardonne le crime. Au final, les juristes estiment que les sanctions les plus courantes pour les crimes d'honneur varient entre six mois et trois ans.

Considéré obsolète, le code pénal jordanien édité en 1960 pourrait être prochainement modifié. En février dernier, le Ministère de la Justice a fait savoir qu'un comité d'hommes de loi était en train de travailler sur un nouveau code pénal qui s'annonce plus sévère pour les crimes commis contre les femmes et les enfants.

Des efforts semblables sont poursuivis simultanément par les avocates de l'Union des femmes jordanaises. Elles ont identifié plusieurs lois discriminatoires à l'égard des femmes et en ont discuté pendant deux jours cette semaine dans le cadre d'un séminaire consacré aux crimes d'honneur. Parmi différentes propositions, l'association demande la suppression de l'article 340. A ce sujet, Karmel Saïd du Ministère de la Justice, responsable de la révision du code pénal, laisse entendre que cet article sera juste modifié, de façon à s'appliquer également aux femmes. De son côté, la vice-présidente de l'Union des femmes, Nadia Shamrouh, demeure sceptique : «Il faut durcir les lois, c'est clair, mais ce n'est pas suffisant. C'est la mentalité des gens qu'il faut changer, et ça, c'est plus difficile».

A. M.

C'est la vie

L'agenda culturel d'Amman

Vème festival international du théâtre indépendant



Programme du 28 mars au 1er avril

Centre culturel royal-Théâtre principal à 21h00
28 mars : *Spinning lives*, par El-Warsha (Égypte)
29 et 30 mars : *100 mathématiques à part I*, par Alis (France)
31 mars et 1er avril : *The daughters of Bernorda Alba*, par la Compagnie de théâtre Shrapnel (Égypte)

Centre culturel royal-Théâtre rond à 19h30
28 et 29 mars : *Rumayana*, par le Théâtre Wayang Kulit (Indonésie)
30 et 31 mars : *Habit et Habit*, par le Théâtre Tein Sinan (Algérie)
1er avril : *Another bullet at Bernorda Alba's house*, par Al Fawanees (Jordanie)

Théâtre Osama Al Mashini-Djehel Lwehdeh à 18h00
29 mars : *In thinking of you*, lecture
30 mars : *Al Mutasharraf*, par Al Qasaba (Palestine)

École Ahlia (près du Premier Cercle) à 11h00
28 mars : *The wandering of self*, par l'École Ahlia (Jordanie)

Irbid à 20h30
31 mars : *Widow...*, par Al Fawanees (Jordanie)
1er avril : *Brake in Eternity*, par le Théâtre du jour (Palestine)

Les pièces sont jouées dans la langue du pays d'origine. Prix des places : 4 JD. Pour tout renseignement, notamment le programme au jour le jour des ateliers et des conférences, vous pouvez appeler la troupe Al Fawanees qui est chargée de l'organisation au 5624413.

Nouvelles du Pays

Presse

Le retour du poil à gratter le gouvernement

Abed Rabbo est de nouveau en kiosque. Première victime de la loi liberticide sur les publications, l'hebdomadaire satirique s'est interrompu pendant plus de six mois. Il revient plus incisif que jamais.

Le journal s'est fixé une double mission : faire rire les lecteurs et faire peur au gouvernement. «Par la satire, nous cherchons à exprimer la souffrance intérieure des pauvres gens, ceux qui n'ont pas les moyens de se défendre», explique Abed al-Hadi al-Majali, le rédacteur en chef. Il ne faut pas oublier que le journal est surtout rédigé par des journalistes sans le sou. Mais leurs articles reflètent malgré tout l'opinion de plusieurs couches sociales.

Abed Rabbo (l'esclave de Dieu) est considéré comme le seul journal poil à gratter de toute la région. Reste que le gouvernement n'a pas le droit de le publier à sa guise. Il y a deux semaines, Abed al-Hadi al-Majali était arrêté et interrogé par les autorités pour un photo-montage représentant le Premier ministre : celui-ci, armé d'une loupe est en train de chercher des agents infiltrés

dans le fond d'un pantalon. Une provocation de trop pour un gouvernement tout juste échappé par les événements de Marwan. Son séjour en prison n'a pas freiné le journaliste : «Si j'arrivais, je pensais Abed al-Hadi, j'ai été interrogé sans procès, d'accuser d'espionnage, de trahison, de ligue russe. En fait, ce n'était qu'un moyen pour nous obliger à céder. Nous écrivons toujours dans les limites de notre liberté. Hélas ! la politique ne supporte pas d'être critiquée. Le personnage gouvernemental est tellement sacré que personne ne peut le toucher. Voilà pourquoi il change tous les ans d'adresse de notre question le comportement politique de telle ou telle personne, on est

aussitôt menacé de fermeture». En dépit des menaces, des arrestations et des pressions, l'équipe du journal s'est promise de continuer sur la même voie de la dérision.

Journal d'opposition. Sans quelques changements internes, la politique de

l'hebdomadaire est la même qu'avant son interruption. Financé par l'entreprise de presse Al-Farid qui possède aussi Al-Bilad et Awadef al-Sa'a, Abed Rabbo est un journal indépendant d'opposition comme le reste des hebdomadaires d'ailleurs. «Nous tenons à cet esprit critique pour ne pas perdre le soutien et la con-

fiance de nos lecteurs ici et à l'étranger, insiste le rédacteur en chef, imaginez que l'autre jour, une jeune fille de 15 ans m'a demandé un autographe, je ne pouvais pas le croire. A cet âge, on ne pense qu'aux acteurs et aux chanteurs mais pas à un journal aussi satirique qu'Abed Rabbo».

Sa réputation tient surtout à sa capacité à dire tout haut ce que beaucoup pensent tout bas. Et le samedi, jour de sa parution, les Jordaniens n'hésitent pas à faire la queue devant les kiosques pour récupérer un exemplaire. Samir est ainsi un des lecteurs les plus fidèles. «Heureusement qu'il sort le samedi, se réjouit-il, cela me donne du courage pour bien commencer la semaine. Je m'identifie complètement. Dès que je le lis, je me sens bien. Et puis je respecte sa volonté de combattre toute pression visant à le faire taire».

Rana Kawan-Bagaceen

Le Canard, ce vieillard déchaîné

Maurice Maréchal, homme de presse, veut lutter contre la censure et le «bourrage de crânes». En 1915, il décide de lancer un nouveau journal. Son titre est tiré d'un bon repas et de quelques bonnes bouteilles, en compagnie des pionniers de l'hebdomadaire. On s'accorde assez vite sur Le Canard, puis on cherche un adjectif : sauvage ? Il sera finalement «enchaîné», reprenant le titre d'un journal de Georges Clemenceau opposé à la censure.

Pourquoi Le Canard ? En 1915, le terme désigne le journal, mais aussi «une fausse nouvelle lancée dans la presse», et la presse, à cette époque, abonde de fausses nouvelles contre lesquelles Maurice Maréchal s'insurge. Enfin, en musique, un canard désigne une fausse note, un «couac». Et c'est bien l'objectif des fondateurs du Canard d'être une fausse note dans la Symphonie conformiste de la presse.

Ce journal devient très vite un phénomène de la presse française qui ne cesse d'émouvoir. De fait, il a toujours été populaire. Par sa langue d'abord, mais aussi parce qu'il a toujours pris la parole en faveur du petit contre les grands de ce monde : les politiques, les militaires, les curés, les capitalistes. Il est celui qui donne aux Français-moyens les informations que lui cachent les hommes politiques et les autres organes d'information. L'une des rai-

sons de son succès et de l'attachement des lecteurs, c'est aussi qu'il a su garder ses débuts - et conserver ensuite - son indépendance. Cette indépendance est d'abord économique avec le refus de toute publicité. Intransigeance incarnée par ce paradoxe : le seul journal d'informations à vivre sans manne publicitaire est l'un des seuls à être bénéficiaire. S'il penche plutôt à gauche, Le Canard a su rester aussi indépendant des partis. Il est celui qui brocarde la comédie politique, donc il est perçu comme n'en faisant pas partie.

Enfin, si sa forme, son style et son ton sont restés proches de ceux des débuts, Le Canard enchaîné a beaucoup changé. «Ce qui est important pour nous, aujourd'hui, dans nos orientations, c'est ce combat permanent pour le débarras de crânes, cette volonté de ne pas prendre les informations institutionnelles pour argent comptant», explique l'actuel directeur, Michel Gaillard. Journal satirique, Le Canard est devenu aussi un journal sérieux d'information et d'investigation, mais il continue à le faire en restant fidèle aux principes de son fondateur Maurice Maréchal : «Quand je vois quelque chose de scandaleux, mon premier mouvement est de m'indigner, mon second mouvement est de rire, c'est plus difficile mais plus efficace».

Le Jourdain avec l'aide du Monde



Chirac au salon de l'agriculture

«Je salue...»



... la France qui bouse ?

كلمة عربية

THE STAR'S WORKSTATION COMPUTING & HIGH TECH

Edited by Zeid Nasser

Computer & IT companies !!

Welcome to The Star's Workstation, the absolute source on what's hot and what's not in Jordan's IT market. Fax us on 4648298 or email us at StarNETS.com.Jo with your news and views.

A lack of awareness reason for low quality software: Professional software, professional procedures

By Muna Nazzari
Special to The Star

SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT of any nature, whether in the fields of business or leisure software, requires approximately six stages before completion.

These are performed by specialized programmers, each with experience in his/her chosen field. The steps are as follows:

- System Analysis: Looking at the requirements, analyzing them to develop a solution.
- Design: Designing a program structure, file inputs and outputs.
- Programming: Actual coding.
- Debugging: Testing the code.
- Documentation: Creating written documentation on step-by-step usage of the software system.
- Implementation: Entering real-life data and using the system.

As you go through the stages of development, the technical skill required by the specialist responsible ranges from computer science and analysis, to business skills. So there is a gradual move from highly technical skills required to practical business skills.

In software development companies all over the world, the above steps and procedures are handled each by a different, specialized staff member. Also,

within each stage, the workload can be divided into modules with different people working on each of those.

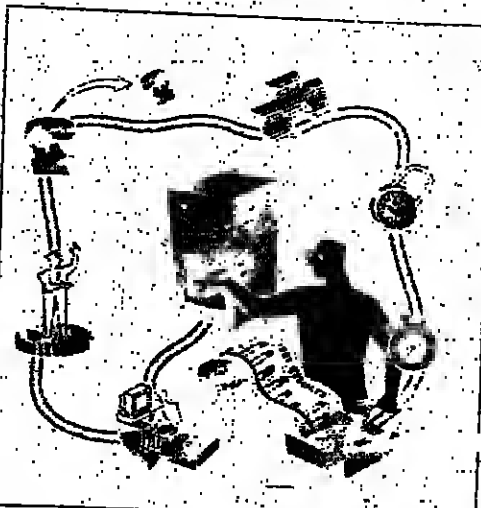
In Jordan, within the companies that develop tailor-made software, the general idea is to

for a manager to explain the requirements to the developer and *voilà!* They have the software they need.

Given this mentality, serious software development companies in Jordan have not been able to grow. They have had to face major obstacles, such as explaining why it costs so much more to hire a specialized company, as opposed to the lower cost option of hiring and in-house developer; and they also have to compete with low-quality software development firms, whose lower prices of programming services undermine the profession.

There is a need for more awareness, which could possibly be achieved through launching a campaign targeted at clients and end-users, explaining the benefits of working with professional development companies, as opposed to one-person solutions, which deliver less than desired results and hurt the user in the long run, in terms of unseen costs of software maintenance, and lost productivity.

If we look at tailor-made packages developed in our market, we will find there are many talented, skilled programmers and software specialists. Of course, most need to develop their skills further before



employ a programmer to develop a software package.

That one person is expected to perform the six stages alone, even if this programmer does not have the complete technical skills required. This, of course, causes all sorts of delays and results in the production of software with lower performance than required.

The problem is that this belief is shared by clients, who sometimes opt for hiring their own in-house developer to produce a full software system. They think that all it takes is

Opening this week at the Radisson SAS Hotel Amman: 6th American Computer Show

THIS WEEK, on Wednesday 1 April, the Sixth Annual American Computer Show opens its doors to the public and runs for two days until 2 Thursday.

The show has become a major event, celebrated every year, with the participation of around 30 local computer and information technology companies that offer American-made products for the Jordanian market.

As usual, you can expect to see the latest hardware, software and solutions on show as the companies exhibiting range in the nature of their services. There are top PC dealers, major Internet Service Providers and Bulletin Board Services, software solutions providers and general accessories suppliers.

Companies participating include Abdul Majid Maragah



Trading & Contracting Services (CNS), FinNet, General Computers & Electronics (GCE), JOIN-NET, Jordan Micro-Tech, Jordan Mobile Telephone Services, Jordan Radio Paging, Kayyali for Computers, Arabist, Modern Systems & Computer Trade, N.C.R., NETS, Ra'ed Al Arabi Computer Corp., Sandi Communication Systems, Sinam Integrated Systems, Specialized Technical Services (STS), Tantash Information Systems Group (TISG) and United Business Machines.

Don't miss out on the American Computer Show, it's a great chance to shop around for a piece of hardware or software you desire.

The show will run at the Radisson SAS Hotel Amman, in the Royal and Ambassador Halls.

& Co., Accu-Tech, Applied Technical Systems, Aramex, Global One Communications, Ideal Group, Ideal Soft, Ideal Systems, International Business Systems, BYTE Middle East magazine, Comcent

Global One upgrades Internet speed, adds lines

AS PART of Global One's continued effort to upgrade its system and constantly improve its Internet service, the company announced the global Internet International speed will be increased by 1 Mbps, making it the fastest Internet provider by far in Jordan.

Also, more lines are being

added to the 562-0901 hunt group. Some interruptions may be experienced during the days in which this expansion is being implemented.

Global One asks its customers to kindly bear with them, as the end result will be worth the wait. Once this

expansion is completed, users will be able to enjoy more than double the current Internet browsing speed, no disconnections, and less busy lines. Users will be able to judge this improvement for themselves.

Global One would like to hear the opinion of its users regarding this new improvement. Kindly send comments or please e-mail us at info@go.com.jo.



News update

Stunning growth for Compaq in the Middle East
Compaq Middle East announced that its sales for the second half of 1997 grew by a stunning 81 percent, compared

to the same period in 1996. Accordingly, the increase in total revenue had been around 60 percent.

This figure is particularly impressive, as it resembles around double the industry average growth calculated by International Data Corp. (IDC) at 27 %.

The growth in revenues in a number of selected countries were as follows: UAE 75 percent, Oman 108 percent, Saudi Arabia 51 percent, Egypt 72 percent, Bahrain 86 percent, Qatar 51 percent and Jordan grew by 86 percent.

CeBit '98 in Hannover is a success.
The largest computer show

in Europe, and possibly the eastern hemisphere started on 19 March, 1998 and ran until 25 March.

The massive numbers of visitors reached a phenomenal figure of 600,000. As for participating companies, the number was a whopping 7,000.

Germany hosts this major event, and hopes to increase its share of the global information technology market. Germany's current share of the international market stands at \$180 billion, constituting around eight percent, which authorities are working hard to raise.

A number of Jordanian computer and technology personnel attend CeBit regularly, and this year is no different.

INTERFACE BY ZEID NASSER

Maintenance blues

WHEN MY good-old monitor glimmered with a shade of red, and then launched into a sequence of flashes, I knew exactly what this all meant. It was maintenance time again and I have to endure the usual hassle.

Actually, having to check out your PC every once in a while and finding out how much maintenance systems and services have developed in the country, is always interesting.

Anyway, as usual, I called up my "trusted" supplier, and enquired about the maintenance arrangement.

"Do you have a maintenance contract," he asked. "No," I answered. That was when his voice turned lower as he said, "Well, you should have had one!" Naturally, that was followed by a lecture on the importance of maintenance contracts for computers and how around JD 150 paid at the beginning of the year would secure my system and maintain my productivity.

Of course, this is all true, but I, like most PC users in Jordan, simply don't renew my maintenance contract. Why? I don't know? Maybe it's because I can trust my computer to only go wrong once every three years—which is the case. The last time I had to take it for maintenance was in 1995. However, that's no excuse.

Anyway, I moved onto explaining what was wrong with my system. He gave me a couple of theories, then he said that he had to see my PC. If an engineer from the company were to visit me, it would cost JD 25, and that does not include the costs of any parts or additional costs involved in fixing the system. If he decided to take the computer back to the shop, I would still have to pay the 25 dinars.

So, like any cost-conscious PC user, I decided to flex my muscles and load up my car with the PC and monitor and head to my computer supplier. Apart from the fact that I couldn't find parking space near the company's building, the elevator wasn't working and the supplier is on the ninth floor! Anyway, once I entered the maintenance area in the company I was amazed. I had never seen so much malfunctioning PC hardware piled up before! There were three engineers and technicians hard at work and a pleasant supervisor took care of me.

Getting back to the issue of maintenance contracts, us computer users never learn. I for one was previously "hit" because I didn't have a maintenance contract. Back in 1994, my hard disk failed, it cost me JD 125 to replace. If I had a maintenance contract then, I wouldn't have paid that sum, and I would have received a full, monthly check-ups of my hardware for the value of JD 110 a year—that's less than the repair costs I paid!

Also, if computer users applied some basic, self-checking procedures regularly, a lot of troubles faced would be eliminated. Have you ever seen pictures or advertisements for those "little vacuum cleaners", the ones you should use every couple of months to clean the inside of your computer with? Well, they are useful and prevent computer failure, especially today in the "overheating" Pentium age, when dust can affect the work of your processor's fan and cause all sorts of errors.

On the software side, utilities like Norton Utilities and others help keep your data storage in good shape and check your hardware for any potential errors. Of course, it goes without saying that it would help if you didn't bash your computer or slam your tower-case with your leg! No, seriously, delicate silicon chips and boards lie inside your computer case. Remember that next time you sit at your PC.

As of yet, I am still without my PC, as I await the "doctor's diagnosis", and hope that it won't turn a hole in my pocket; especially as I asked for a complete "physical checkup". Somehow, my computer's sudden malfunction will turn out for the better. After all, even computers need occasional pampering!

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Russians do not go gently into Polar night

By Carol J. Williams

KOLA, Russia—A soft, primrose glow gathers on the horizon as the weak winter sun struggles to revive the slumbering arctic landscape.

From the blackness that lades in gray each day, skeletal shrubs take shape against their snowbound backdrop, slowly emerging, black on white, like images in a developing photograph.

Short days and freezing temperatures will persevere through April in this icy outpost that shares a latitude with the north coast of Alaska, but the worst of winter's hardships are at least on the wane.

So why, the hardy settlers of this northern community wonder as they massage their aching temples, are these first days of freedom from the polar night's unbroken darkness the most dispiriting season of the year?

"This is the worst time, even worse than the weeks of endless darkness," sighed Antonina Selivanova, who lives in this remote territory that Soviet planners made a stage for the struggle of man against nature. "I feel depleted, like all my energy leaked out during that long night."

Medical professionals have only recently put a name to the fatigue and depression afflicting many of the 1 million Russians who make their homes on the inhospitable Kola Peninsula—Polar Night Stress.

But the listlessness and dysfunction caused by the harsh northern elements is now a recognized menace to both mind and body, and another challenge to those trying to correct the Communist era's reckless development drive into the hostile North.

Nature never meant for humans to live and prosper at this latitude, where winter temperatures plummet to minus-40 (both Fahrenheit and Celsius) and Arctic winds roar across the frozen terrain, grounding aircraft and blocking roads out of the city with freakish snowdrifts.

Nevertheless, Soviet planners deployed hundreds of thousands of workers to this



Murmansk residents stroll on streets lit artificially in the subfreezing temperatures. Photo for the Los Angeles Times by Jacqueline Mia Foster.

region to build factories to process the Kola Peninsula's abundant minerals, ports to house the Soviet submarine fleet and nuclear reactors to generate power for much of northern Russia.

That many of the settlers never got used to the dark, brutal winters, or to the unrelenting daylight of late spring, was a social side effect paid no heed in the development-obsessed Communist era.

"The polar night affects the body's natural rhythms, especially for those who come here from more temperate climates in central Russia and have to undergo serious physical adaptation," said Lev Sokol, a cardiologist with the Regional Diagnostic Center in nearby Murmansk.

"For normal, healthy adults, it is only a question of time before their bodies adjust to the new conditions. But for those with other physical complaints, the stress can be quite severe."

Sokol and other health care professionals contend that Polar Night Stress is distinctive

from its North American cousin, Seasonal Affective Disorder, which produces similar symptoms among many Canadians and Alaskans.

The Russian anomalies result from the compounding stress of living in a country beset by general turmoil and in a region where bonuses that once compensated for hardships have been severely reduced.

"The isolation factor here is very influential," Sokol said. "There are no pleasant signs of nature around us, and the extreme temperatures and the winds affect people as much as the dark."

Women in their 40s and 50s are the most susceptible, say the medical experts, although no formal research has been conducted on the condition because of a lack of funding.

Peninsula for more than 20 years, said she feels as frozen as the landscape during the two months of total darkness and these lifeless weeks that drag with painful lassitude toward the vernal equinox.

"I know I should try to shake myself out of it," said the widow of eight years who is overweight and suffers from heart disease and liver malfunction. "The doctors tell me to keep busy, but all I really want to do is sleep."

Yelena Guryanova has lived in the Kola region for all but five of her 37 years but insists that experience is no shield against the polar night's psychological onslaught.

She plans to return to more temperate Karelia, her home region on the Finnish border, when her husband retires from the military intelligence service that currently posts them here. She has left her teaching career, where the pay was miserly and slow in coming, to manage the Bronzary tanning salon at Murmansk's Five Corners Square.

"Of course I would prefer more intellectual stimulation, but here the clientele is better off than the average person and more focused on having fun," said Guryanova, who complains of headaches and depression at this time of year.

At 35 rubles (about \$5.75) per 20-minute session, the solarium at Bronzary and at least half a dozen similar businesses in the Murmansk area are a luxury for average working people whose salaries are often as low as \$200 a month. But with the 120 percent hardship supplements still applied to most government jobs in the extreme North—even if both pay and benefits are often delayed—the mood-boosting tanning salons are a booming business.

"At this time of year, the only way I can feel better is to try to look

better," said Svetlana Pluzhnikova, a 28-year-old executive secretary with lightened hair and a toned, tanned body.

For pensioners and others struggling to put food on the table, however, cosmetic treatments are too costly and offer them no guarantee of feeling better about their grim surroundings.

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